

POEMS OF
BAUDELAIRE

A translation of
LES FLEURS DU MAL

by
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Translator's Note

THESE POEMS have been known to four generations, ever since they were first popularised by Swinburne, as the *Flowers of Evil*, but "Flowers of Sickness," "Flowers of Anguish" or "Flowers of Pain" would better describe a great many of them than "Flowers of Evil", since the word *mal* covers all these interpretations.

Having had considerable success with my translation of a Saint, St. John of the Cross, I determined to translate a fellow-sinner who is hardly less a believer, even in his rebellious and blasphemous moments, than the Saint himself. I have been reading Baudelaire since I was fifteen, carried him in my haversack through two wars, and loved him longer and more deeply than any other poet. I translated St. John of the Cross because he miraculously saved my life in Toledo. I am translating Baudelaire because he lived my life up to the same age, with similar sins, remorses, ostracisms, and poverty and the same desperate hope of reconciliation and pardon: and I may say to him as Manuel Barbosa du Bocage said to Luis de Camoes,

" And though in shame and all precarious shifts
You were my Model—mine's the crowning sorrow,
To share your luck, but lack your towering gifts."

I have tried to be as colloquial as possible, though I had to come down to *Thou* and *Thee* in the translation of his Latin poem in imitation of a Mediaeval hymn. I have also avoided Cockney rhymes as far as was possible for an r-less colonial to do. Poetic abbreviations like *o'er*, *ere*, *mid*, etc., I have generally avoided, in spite of their metrical convenience, since they long ago fell out of vernacular use, and therefore impair the sense of reality in a poem or the translation of one.

Dedication.

This translation is dedicated to

ROB AND FELICIA LYIE

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1866-1868

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LES FLEURS DU MAL 1861

To the Reader

Folly and error, avarice and vice,
Employ our souls and waste our bodies' force.
As mangey beggars incubate their lice,
We nourish our innocuous remorse.

Our sins are stubborn, craven our repentance.
For our weak vows we ask excessive prices.
Trusting our tears will wash away the sentence,
We sneak off where the muddy road entices.

Cradled in evil, that Thrice-Great Magician,
The Devil, rocks our souls, that can't resist;
And the rich metal of our own volition
Is vaporised by that sage alchemist.

The Devil pulls the strings by which we're worked:
By all revolting objects lured, we slink
Hellwards; each day down one more step we're jerked
Feeling no horror, through the shades that stink.

Just as a lustful pauper bites and kisses
The scarred and shivelled breast of an old whore,
We steal, along the roadside, furtive blisses,
Squeezing them, like stale oranges, for more.

Packed tight, like hives of maggots, thickly seething,
Within our brains a host of demons surges.
Deep down into our lungs at every breathing,
Death flows, an unseen river, moaning dirges.

If rape or arson, poison, or the knife
Has wove no pleasing patterns in the stuff
Of this drab canvas we accept as life—
It is because we are not bold enough!

Amongst the jackals, leopards, mongrels, apes,
Snakes, scorpions, vultures, that with hellish din,
Squeal, roar, writhe, gambol, crawl, with monstrous shapes,
In each man's foul menagerie of sin—

There's one more damned than all. He never gambols,
Nor crawls, nor roars, but, from the rest withdrawn,
Gladly of this whole earth would make a shambles
And swallow up existence with a yawn . . .

Boredom! He smokes his hookah, while he dreams
Of gibbets, weeping tears he cannot smother.
You know this dainty monster, too, it seems—
Hypocrite reader!—You!—My twin!—My brother!

SPLEEN ET IDEAL

I

Benediction

When by an edict of the powers supreme
A poet's born into this world's drab space,
His mother starts, in horror, to blaspheme
Clenching her fists at God, who grants her grace.

“Would that a nest of vipers I'd aborted
Rather than this absurd abomination.
Cursed be the night of pleasures vainly sported
On which my womb conceived my expiation.

Since of all women I am picked by You
To be my Mate's aversion and his shame:
And since I cannot, like a *billet-doux*,
Consign this stunted monster to the flame,

I'll turn the hatred, which You load on me,
On the curst tool through which You work your spite,
And twist and stunt this miserable tree
Until it cannot burgeon for the blight.”

She swallows down the white froth of her ire
And, knowing naught of schemes that are sublime,
Deep in Gehenna, starts to lay the pyre
That's consecrated to maternal crime.

Yet with an unseen Angel for protector
The outcast waif grows drunken with the sun,
And finds ambrosia, too, and rosy nectar
In all he eats or drinks, suspecting none.

He sings upon his *Via Crucis*, plays
With winds, and with the clouds exchanges words :
The Spirit following his pilgrim-ways
Weeps to behold him gayer than the birds.

Those he would love avoid him as in fear,
Or, growing bold to see one so resigned,
Compete to draw from him a cry or tear,
And test on him the fierceness of their kind.

In food or drink that's destined for his taste
They mix saliva foul with cinders black,
Drop what he's touched with hypocrite distaste,
And blame themselves for walking in 'his track.

His wife goes crying in the public way
—“Since fair enough he finds me to adore,
The part of ancient idols I will play
And gild myself with coats of molten ore.

I will get drunk on incense, myrrh, and nard,
On genuflexions, meat, and heady wine.
Out of his crazed and wondering regard,
I'll laugh to steal prerogatives divine.

When by such impious farces bored at length,
I'll place my frail strong hand on him, and start,
With nails like those of harpies in their strength,
To plough myself a pathway to his heart.

Like a young bird that trembles palpitating,
I'll wrench his heart, all crimson, from his chest,
And to my favourite beast, his hunger sating,
Will fling it in the gutter with a jest.”

Skyward, to where he sees a Throne blaze splendid,
The pious Poet lifts his arms on high,
And the vast lightnings of his soul extended
Blot out the crowds and tumults from his eye.

“Blessèd be You, O God, who give us pain,
As cure for our impurity and wrong—
Essence that primes the stalwart to sustain
Scrapic raptures that were else too strong.

I know that for the Poet You've a post,
Where the blest Legions take their ranks and stations,
Invited to the revels with the host
Of Virtues, Powers, and Thrones, and Dominations.

That grief's the sole nobility, I know it,
Where neither Earth nor Hell can make attacks,
And that, to deck my mystic crown of poet,
All times and universes paid their tax.

But all the gems from old Palmyra lost,
The ores unmixed, the pearls of the abyss,
Set by Your hand, could not suffice the cost
Of such a blazing diadem as this.

Because it will be only made of light,
Drawn from the hearth of the essential rays,
To which our mortal eyes, when burning bright,
Are but the tarnished mirrors that they glaze.”

II

The Albatross

Sometimes for sport the men of loafing crews
Snare the great albatrosses of the deep,
The indolent companions of their cruise
As through the bitter vastitudes they sweep.

Scarce have they fished aboard these airy kings
When helpless on such unaccustomed floors,
They piteously droop their huge white wings
And trail them at their sides like drifting oars.

How comical, how ugly, and how meek
Appears this soarer of celestial snows !
One, with his pipe, teases the golden beak,
One, limping, mocks the cripple as he goes.

The Poet, like this monarch of the clouds,
Despising archers, rides the storm elate.
But, stranded on the earth to jeering crowds,
The great wings of the giant baulk his gait.

III

Elevation

Above the valleys and the lakes: beyond
The woods, seas, clouds and mountain-ranges: far
Above the sun, the aethers silver-swanned
With nebulae, and the remotest star,

My spirit! with agility you move
Like a strong swimmer with the seas to fight,
Through the blue vastness furrowing your grove
With an ineffable and male delight.

Far from these foetid marshes, be made pure
In the pure air of the superior sky,
And drink, like some most exquisite liqueur,
The fire that fills the lucid realms on high.

Beyond where cares or boredom hold dominion,
Which charge our fogged existence with their spleen,
Happy is he who with a stalwart pinion
Can seek those fields so shining and serene:

Whose thoughts, like larks, rise on the freshening breeze,
Who fans the morning with his tameless wings,
Skims over life, and understands with ease
The speech of flowers and other voiceless things.

IV

Correspondences

Nature's a temple where each living column,
At times, gives forth vague words. There Man advances
Through forest-groves of symbols, strange and solemn,
Who follow him with their familiar glances.

As long-drawn echoes mingle and transfuse
Till in a deep, dark unison they swoon,
Vast as the night or as the vault of noon—
So are commingled perfumes, sounds, and hues.

There can be perfumes cool as children's flesh,
Like fiddles, sweet, like meadows greenly fresh.
Rich, complex, and triumphant, others roll

With the vast range of all non-finite things—
Amber, musk, incense, benjamin, each sings
The transports of the senses and the soul.

V

I love the thought of those old naked days
When Phoebus gilded torsos with his rays,
When men and women sported, strong and fleet,
Without anxiety or base deceit,
And heaven caressed them, amorously keen
To prove the health of each superb machine.
Cybele then was lavish of her guerdon
And did not find her sons too gross a burden :
But, like a she-wolf, in her love great-hearted,
Her full brown teats to all the world imparted.
Bold, handsome, strong, Man, rightly, might evince
Pride in the glories that proclaimed him prince—
Fruits pure of outrage, by the blight unsmitten,
With firm, smooth flesh that cried out to be bitten.

Today the Poet, when he would assess
Those native splendours in the nakedness
Of man or woman, feels a sombre chill
Enveloping his spirit and his will.
He meets a gloomy picture, which he loathes,
Wherin deformity cries out for clothes.
Oh comic runts ! Oh ! horror of burlesque !
Lank, flabby, skewed, pot-bellied, and grotesque !
Whom their smug god, Utility (poor brats !)
Has swaddled in his brazen clouts “ersatz”
As with cheap tinsel. Women tallow-pale,
Both gnawed and nourished by debauch, who trail
The heavy burden of maternal vice,
Or of fecundity the hideous price.

We have (corrupted nations) it is true
Beauties the ancient people never knew—
Sad faces gnawed by cancers of the heart

And charms which morbid lassitudes impart.
But these inventions of our tardy muse
Can't force our ailing peoples to refuse
Just tribute to the holiness of youth
With its straightforward mien, its forehead couth,
The limpid gaze, like running water bright,
Diffusing, careless, through all things, like the light
Of azure skies, the birds, the winds, the flowers,
The songs, and perfumes, and heart-warming powers.

VI

The Beacons

Rubens, the grove of ease, Nepenthe's river
Couch of cool flesh, where Love may never be,
But where life ever flows and seems to quiver
As air in heaven, or, in the sea, the sea.

Da Vinci, dusky mirror and profound,
Where angels, smiling mystery, appear,
Shaded by pines and glaciers, that surround
And seem to shut their country in the rear.

Rembrandt, sad hospital of murmurs, where
Adorned alone by one great crucifix,
From offal-heaps exhales the weeping prayer
That winter shoots a sunbeam to transfix.

Vague region, Michaelangelo, where Titans
Are mixed with Christs: and strong ghosts rise, in crowds,
To stand bolt upright in the gloom that lightens,
With gristly talons tearing through their shroud.

Rage of the boxer, mischief of the sun,
Extracting beauty out of blackguards' looks---
The heart how proud, the man how pinched and drawn---
Puget the mournful emperor of crooks!

Watteau, the carnival, where famous hearts
Go flitting by like butterflies that burn,
While through gay scenes each chandelier imparts
A madness to the dancers as they turn.

Goya's a nightmare full of things unguessed,
Of foeti stewed on nights of witches' revels.
Crones ogle mirrors; children scarcely dressed,
Adjust their hose to tantalise the devils.

A lake of gore where fallen angels dwell
Is Delacroix, by firwoods ever fair,
Where under fretful skies strange fanfares swell
Like Weber's sighs and heartbeats in the air.

These curses, blasphemies, and lamentations,
These ecstasies, tears, cries and soaring psalms—
Through endless mazes, their reverberations
Bring, to our mortal hearts, divinest balms.

A thousand sentinels repeat the cry.
A thousand trumpets echo. Beacon-tossed
A thousand summits flare it through the sky,
A call of hunters in the jungle lost.

And certainly this is the most sublime
Proof of our worth and value, Oh Divinity,
That this great sob rolls on through ageless time
To die upon the shores of your infinity.

VII

The Sick Muse

Alas, poor Muse, what ails you so today?
Your hollow eyes with midnight visions burn,
And turn about, in your complexion play
Madness and horror, cold and taciturn.

Green succubus and rosy imp—have they
Poured you both fear and love into one glass?
Or with his tyrant fist the nightmare, say,
Submerged you in some fabulous morass?

I wish that, breathing health, your breast might nourish
Ever robuster thoughts therein to flourish:
And that your Christian blood, in rhythmic flow,

With those old polysyllables would chime,
Where, turn about, reigned Phoebus, sire of rhyme,
And Pan, the lord of harvests long ago.

VIII

The Venal Muse

Muse of my heart, of palaces the lover,
Where will you, when the blast of winter blows,
In the black boredom of snowed lights, discover
A glowing brand to warm your violet toes?

How will you there revive^{*} your marbled skin
At the chill rays your shutters then disperse?
The gold of azure heavens will you win
When empty are your palate and your purse?

You'll need each evening, then, to earn your bread
As choirboys swinging censers that are dead
Who sing *Te Deums* which they disbelieve:

Or, fasting pierrette, trade your loveliness
And laughter, soaked in tears that none can guess,
The boredom of the vulgar to relieve.

IX

The Evil Monk

The walls of cloisters on their frescoed lath
Displayed, in pictures, sacred truths of old,
Whose sight would warm the entrails of one's faith
To temper their austerity and cold.

In times when every sowing flowered for Christ
I lived famous monks, now out of memory's reach;
The graveyard for their library sufficed,
And Death was glorified in simple speech.

My soul's a grave, where, evil cenobite,
To all eternity I have been banned.
Nothing adorns this cloister full of spite.

O idle monk! Say, to what end were planned
The living spectacle of my sad plight,
Love of my eye, or labour of my hand?

X

The Enemy

My youth was but a tempest, dark and savage,
Through which, at times, a dazzling sun would shoot.
The thunder and the rain have made such ravage
My garden is nigh bare of rosy fruit.

Now I have reached the Autumn of my thought,
And spade and rake must toil the land to save,
That fragments of my flooded fields be sought
From where the water sluices out a grave.

Who knows if the new flowers my dreams prefigure,
In this washed soil should find, as by a sluit,
The mystic nourishment to give them vigour?

Time swallows up our life, O ruthless rigour!
And the dark foe that nibbles our heart's root,
Grows on our blood the stronger and the bigger!

XI

III Luck

So huge a burden to support
Your courage, Sisyphus, would ask ;
Well though my heart attacks its task,
Yet Art is long and Time is short.

Far from the famed memorial arch
Towards a lonely grave I come.
My heart in its funereal march
Goes beating like a muffled drum.

—Yet many a gem lies hidden still
Of whom no pick-axe, spade, or drill
The lonely secrecy invades ;

And many a flower, to heal regret,
Pours forth its fragrant secret yet
Amidst the solitary shades.

XII

Former Life

I've lived beneath huge portals where marine
Suns coloured, with a myriad fires, the waves ;
At eve majestic pillars made the scene
Resemble those of vast basaltic caves.

The breakers, rolling the reflected skies,
Mixed, in a solemn, enigmatic way,
The powerful symphonies they seem to play
With colours of the sunset in my eyes.

There did I live in a voluptuous calm
Where breezes, waves, and splendours roved as vagrants ;
And naked slaves, impregnated with fragrance,

Would fan my forehead with their fronds of palm :
Their only charge was to increase the anguish
Of secret grief in which I loved to languish.

XIII

Gipsies on the Road

The tribe of seers, last night, began its march
With burning eyes, and shouldering its young
To whose ferocious appetites it swung
The wealth of hanging breasts that nought can parch.

The men, their weapons glinting in the rays,
Walk by the convoy where their folks are carted,
Sweeping the far-off skylines with a gaze
Regretful of Chimeras long-departed.

Out of his hole the cricket sees them pass
And sings the louder. Greener grows the grass
Because Cybele loves them, and has made

The barren rock to gush, the sands to flower,
To greet these travellers, before whose power
Familiar futures open realms of shade.

XIV

Man and the Sea

Free man, you'll always love the sea—for this,
That it's a mirror, where you see your soul
In its eternal waves that chafe and roll;
Nor is your soul less bitter an abyss.

In your reflected image there to merge,
You love to dive, its eyes and limbs to match.
Sometimes your heart forgets its own, to catch
The rhythm of that wild and tameless dirge.

The two of you are shadowy, deep, and wide.
Man! None has ever plummeted your floor—
Sea! None has ever known what wealth you store
Both are so jealous of the things you hide!

Yet age on age is ended, or begins,
While you without remorse or pity fight.
So much in death and carnage you delight,
Eternal wrestlers! Unrelenting twins!

XV

Don Juan in Hell

When, having reached the subterranean wave,
Don Juan paid his passage from the shore,
Proud as Antisthenes, a surly knave
With vengeful arms laid hold of either oar.

With hanging breasts between their mantles showing
Sad women, writhing under the black sky,
Made as they went, the sound of cattle lowing
As from a votive herd that's led to die.

Sganarelle for his wages seemed to linger,
And laughed; while to the dead assembled there,
Don Luis pointed out with trembling finger
The son who dared to flout his silver hair.

Chilled in her crêpe, the chaste and thin Elvira,
Standing up close to her perfidious spouse,
Seemed to be pleading from her old admirer
For that which thrilled his first, unbroken vows.

A great stone man in armour leaped aboard;
Seizing the helm, the coal-black wave he cleft.
But the calm hero, leaning on his sword,
Had eyes for nothing but the wake they left.

XVI

The Punishment of Pride

When first Theology in her young prime
Flourished with vigour, in that wondrous time,
Of an illustrious Doctor it was said
That, having forced indifferent hearts to shed
Tears of emotion, moved to depths profound:
And having to celestial glory found
Marvellous paths, to his own self unknown,
Where only purest souls had fared alone—
Like a man raised too high, as in a panic,
Crazed with a vertigo of pride satanic,
He cried “Poor Christ, I’ve raised you to renown!
But had I wished to bring you crashing down
Probing your flaws, your shame would match your pride
And you’d be but a foetus to deride!”

Immediately he felt his wits escape,
That flash of sunlight veiled itself in crêpe.
All chaos through his intellect was rolled,
A temple once, containing hoards of gold,
By opulence and order well controlled,
And topped with ceilings splendid to behold.
Silence and night installed their reign in him.
It seemed he was a cellar dank and dim,
To which no living man could find the key;
And from that day a very beast was he.
And while he wandered senseless on his way,
Not knowing spring from summer, night from day,
Foul, dirty, useless, and with no hereafter,
He served the children as a butt for laughter.

XVII

Beauty

I'm fair, O mortals, as a dream of stone;
My breasts whereon, in turn, your wrecks you shatter,
Were made to wake in poets' hearts alone
A love as indestructible as matter.

A sky-throned sphinx, unknown yet, I combine
The cygnet's whiteness with a heart of snow.
I loathe all movement that displaces line,
And neither tears nor laughter do I know.

Poets before my postures, which I seem
To learn from masterpieces, love to dream
And there in austere thought consume their days.

I have, these docile lovers to subject,
Mirrors that glorify all they reflect—
These eyes, great eyes, eternal in their blaze!

XVIII

The Ideal

It's not with smirking beauties of vignettes,
The shopsoiled products of a worthless age,
With buskinéd feet and hands for castanets—
A heart like mine its longing could assuage.

I leave Gavarni, poct of chloroses,
His twittering flock, anaemic and unreal.
I could not find among such bloodless rostes,
A flower to match my crimson-hued ideal.

To this heart deeper than the deepest canyon,
Lady Macbeth would be a fit companion,
Crime-puissant dream of Aeschylus; or you,

Daughter of Buonarroti, stately Night!
Whose charms to suit a Titan's appetite,
You twist, so strange, yet peaceful, to the view.

XIX

The Giantess

Of old when Nature, in her verve defiant,
Conceived each day some birth of monstrous mien,
I would have lived near some young female giant
Like a voluptuous cat beside a queen;

To see her body flowering with her soul
Freely develop in her mighty games,
And in the mists that through her gaze would roll
Guess that her heart was hatching sombre flames;

To roam her mighty contours as I please,
Ramp on the cliff of her tremendous knees,
And in the solstice, when the suns that kill

Make her stretch out across the land and rest,
To sleep beneath the shadow of her breast
Like a hushed village underneath a hill.

XX

The Mask

(An allegoric statuc in Renaissance style)

TO ERNEST CHRISTOPHE, *sculptor*

Study with me this Florentinian treasure,
Whose undulous and muscular design
Welds Grace with Strength in sisterhood divihe;
A marvel only wonderment can measure,
Divinely strong, superbly slim and fine,
She's formed to reign upon a bed of pleasure
And charm some prince or pontiff in his leisure.

See, too, her smile voluptuously shine,
Where sheer frivolity displays its sign:
That lingering look of languor, guile, and cheek,
The dainty face, which veils of gauze enshrine,
That seems in conquer^g accents thus to speak:

“Pleasure commands me. Love my brow has crowned!”
Enamouring our thoughts in humble duty,
True majesty with merriment is found.
Approach, let's take a turn about her beauty.
O blasphemy! Dread shock! Our hopes to pique,
This lovely body, promising delight,
Ends at the top in a two-headed freak.

But no ! it's just a mask that tricked our sight,
Fooling us with that exquisite grimace :
On the reverse you see her proper face,
Fiercely convulsed, in its true self revealed,
Which from our sight that lying mask concealed.
—O sad great beauty ! The grand river, fed
By your rich tears, debouches in my heart.
Though I am rapt with your deceptive art,
My soul is slaked upon the tears you shed.

And yet why does she weep ? Such peerless grace
Could trample down the conquered human race.
What evil gnaws her flank so strong and sleek ?

She weeps because she's lived, and that she lives.
Madly she weeps for that. But more she grieves
(And at the knees she trembles and goes weak)
Because tomorrow she must live, and then
The next day, and forever—like us men.

XXI

Hymn to Beauty

Did you spring out of heaven or the abyss,
Beauty? Your gaze infernal, yet divine,
Spreads infamy and glory, grief and bliss,
And therefore you can be compared to wine.

Your eyes contain both sunset and aurora:
You give off scents, like evenings storm-deflowered:
Your kisses are a philtre: an amphóra
Your mouth, that cowls the brave, and spurs the coward
Climb you from gulfs, or from the stars descend?
Fate, like a fawning hound, to heel you've brought;
You scatter joy and ruin without end,
Ruling all things, yet answering for naught.

You trample men to death, and mock their clamour.
Amongst your gauds pale Horror gleams and glances,
And Murder, not the least of them in glamour,
On your proud belly amorously dances.

The dazzled insect seeks your candle-rays,
Crackles, and burns, and seems to bless his doom.
The groon bent o'er his bride as in a daze,
Seems, like a dying man, to stroke his tomb.

What matter if from hell or heaven born,
Tremendous monster, terrible to view?
Your eyes and smile reveal to me, like morn,
The Infinite I love but never knew.

From God or Fiend? Siren or Sylph? Invidious
The answer—Fay with eyes of velvet, ray,
Rhythm, and perfume!—if you make less hideous
Our universe, less tedious leave our day.

XXII

Exotic Perfume

When I, with eyes shut, on warm autumn eves,
The fragrance of your warmer breast respire,
I see a country bathed in solar fire
Whose happy shores its lustre never leaves;

An isle of indolence, where nature raises
Singular trees and fruits both sweet and tender,
Where men have bodies vigorous and slender
And women's eyes a candour that amazes.

Led by your scent to fairer climes at last,
I see a port of sails, where every mast
Seems weary of the labours of its cruise;

While scents of tamarind, blown here and there,
Swelling my nostrils as they rinse the air,
Are mingled with the chanties of the crews.

XXIII

Her Hair

O fleece that down her nape rolls, plume on plume !
O curls ! O scent of nonchalance and ease !
What ecstacy ! To populate this room
With memories it harbours in its gloom,
I'd shake it like a banner on the breeze.

Hot Africa and languid Asia play
(An absent world, defunct, and far away)
Within that scented forest, dark and dim.
As other souls on waves of music swim,
Mine on its perfume sails, as on the spray.

I'll journey there, where man and sap-filled tree
Swoon in hot light for hours. Be you my sea,
Strong tresses ! Be the breakers and gales
That waft me. Your black river holds, for me,
A dream of masts and rowers, flames and sails.

A port, resounding there, my soul delivers
With long deep draughts of perfumes, scent, and clamour,
Where ships, that glide through gold and purple rivers,
Fling wide their vast arms to embrace the glamour
Of skies wherein the heat forever quivers.

I'll plunge my head in it, half drunk with pleasure—
In this black ocean that engulfs her form.
My soul, caressed with wavelets there may measure
Infinite rockings in embalmèd leisure,
Creative idleness that fears no storm !

Blue tresses, like a shadow-stretching tent,
You shed the blue of heavens round and far.
Along its downy fringes as I went
I reeled half-drunken to confuse the scent
Of oil of coconuts, with musk and tar.

My hand forever in your mane so dense,
Rubies and pearls and sapphires there will sow,
That you to my desire be never slow--
Oasis of my dreams, and gourd from whence
Deep-draughted wines of memory will flow.

XXIV

More than night's vault, it's you that I adore,
Vessel of sorrow, silent one, the more
Because you flee from me, and seem to place,
Ornament of my nights! more leagues of space
Ironically between me and you
Than part me from these vastitudes of blue.

I charge, attack, and mount to the assau't
As worms attack a corpse within a vault.
And cherish even the coldness that you boast,
By which, harsh beast, you subjugate me most.

XXV

You'd stick the world into your bedside lane.
It's boredom makes you callous to all pain.
To exercise your teeth for this strange task,
A heart upon a rake, each day, you'd ask.
Your eyes lit up like shopfronts, or the trees
With lanterns on the night of public sprees.
Make insolent misuse of borrowed power
And scorn the law of beauty that's their dower.

Oh deaf-and-dumb machine, harm-breeding fool
World sucking leech, yet salutary tool !
Have you not seen your beauties blanch to pass
Before their own reflection in the glass ?
Before this pain, in which you think you're wise
Does not its greatness shock you with surprise,
To think that Nature, deep in projects hidden,
Has chosen you, vile creature of the midden.
To knead a genius for succeeding time.

O sordid grandeur ! Infamy sublime !

XXVI

Sed non Satiata

Strange goddess, brown as evening to the sight,
Whose scent is half of musk, half of havanah,
Work of some obi, Faust of the Savanah,
Ebony witch, and daughter of the night.

By far preferred to troth, or drugs, or sleep,
Love vaunts the red elixir of your mouth.
My caravan of longings seeks in drouth
Your eyes, the wells at which my cares drink deep.

Through those black eyes, by which your soul respires,
Pitiless demon! pour less scorching fires.
I am no Styx nine times with flame to wed.

Nor can I turn myself to Proserpine
To break your spell, Megera libertine!
Within the dark inferno of your bed.

XXVII

With waving opalescence in her gown,
Even when she walks along, you think she's dancing.
Like those long snakes which charmers, while entrancing,
Wave with their wands, in cadence, up and down.

Like the sad sands of deserts and their skies,
By human sufferings untouched and free,
Or like the surfy curtains of the sea,
She flaunts a cold indifference. Her eyes

Are made of charming minerals well-burnished.
Her nature, both by sphynx and angel furnished,
Is old, intact, symbolic, and bizarre :

She seems, made all of gems, steel, light, and gold,
In barrenness, majestic, hard, and cold,
To blaze forever, like a useless star.

XXVIII

The Snake that Dances

I love to watch, while you are lazing,
Your skin. It iridesces
Like silk or satin, smoothly-glazing
The light that it caresses.

Under your tresses dark and deep
Where acrid perfumes drown,
A fragrant sea whose breakers sweep
In mazes blue or brown,

My soul, a ship, to the attraction
Of breezes that bedizen
Its swelling canvas, clears for action
And seeks a far horizon.

Your eyes where nothing can be seen
Either of sweet or bitter
But gold and iron mix their sheen,
Seem frosty gems that glitter.

To see you rhythmically advancing
Seems to my fancy fond
As if it were a serpent dancing
Waved by the charmer's wand.

Under the languorous moods that weigh it,
Your childish head bows down:
Like a young elephant's you sway it
With motions soft as down.

Your body leans upon the hips
Like a fine ship that laves
Its hull from side to side, and dips
Its yards into the waves.

When, as by glaciers ground, the spate
Swells hissing from beneath,
The water of your mouth, elate,
Rises between your teeth—

It seems some old Bohemian vintage
Triumphant, fierce, and tart,
A liquid heaven that showers a mintage
Of stars across my heart.

XXIX

The Carcase

The object that we saw, let us recall,
This summer morn when warmth and beauty mingle
At the path's turn, a carcase lay asprawl
Upon a bed of shingle.

Legs raised, like some old whore far-gone in passion,
The burning, deadly, poison-sweating mass,
Opened its paunch in careless, cynic fashion,
Ballooned with evil gas.

On this putrescence the sun blazed in gold,
Cooking it to a turn with eager care—
So to repay to Nature, hundredfold,
What she had mingled there.

The sky, as on the opening of a flower,
On this superb obscenity smiled bright.
The stench drove at us, with such fearsome power
You thought you'd swoon outright.

Flies trumpeted upon the rotten belly
Whence larvae poured in legions far and wide,
And flowed, like molten and liquefient jelly,
Down living rags of hide.

The mass ran down, or, like a wave elated
Rolled itself on, and crackled as if frying:
You'd think that corpse, by vague breath animated,
Drew life from multiplying.

Through that strange world a rustling rumour ran
Like rushing water or a gust of air,
Or grain that winnowers, with rhythmic fan,
Sweep simmering here and there.

It seemed a dream after the forms grew fainter,
Or like a sketch that slowly seems to dawn
On a forgotten canvas, which the painter
From memory has drawn.

Behind the rocks a restless cur that slunk
Eyed us with fretful greed to recommence
His feast, amidst the bonework, on the chunk
That he had torn from thence.

Yet you'll resemble this infection too
One day, and stink and sprawl in such a fashion,
Star of my eyes, sun of my nature, you,
My angel and my passion!

Yes, you must come to this, O queen of graces,
At length, when the last sacraments are over,
And you go down to moulder in dark places
Beneath the grass and clover.

Then tell the vermin as it takes its pleasance
And feasts with kisses on that face of yours,
I've kept intact in form and godlike essence
Our decomposed amours!

XXX

De Profundis Clamavi

Have pity, my one love and sole delight!
Down to a dark abyss my heart has sounded,
A mournful world, by grey horizons bounded,
Where blasphemy and horror swim by night.

For half the year a heatless sun gives light,
The other half the night obscures the earth.
The arctic regions never knew such dearth:
No woods, nor streams, nor creatures meet the sight.

No horror in the world could match in dread
The cruelty of that dire sun of frost,
And that huge night like primal chaos spread.

I envy creatures of the vilest kind
That they in stupid slumber can be lost—
So slowly does the skein of time unwind!

XXXI

The Vampire

You, who like a dagger ploughed
Into my heart with deadly thrill:
You who, stronger than a crowd
Of demons, mad, and dressed to kill,

Of my dejected soul have made
Your bed, your lodging, and domain:
To whom I'm linked (Unseemly Jade!)
As is a convict to his chain,

Or as the gamester to his dice,
Or as the drunkard to his dram,
Or as the carrion to its lice—
I curse you. Would my curse could damn!

I have besought the sudden blade
To win for me my freedom back.
Perfidious poison I have prayed
To help my cowardice. Alack!

Both poison and the sword disdained
My cowardice, and seemed to say
“ You are not fit to be unchained
From your damned servitude. Away,

You imbecile! since if from her empire
We were to liberate the slave,
You'd raise the carrion of your vampire,
By your own kisses, from the grave.”

XXXII

One night when, near a fearful Jewess lying,
As one corpse by another corpse, I sprawled—
Beside the venal body I was buying,
The beauty that was absent I recalled.

I pictured you in native majesty
With glances full of energy and grace,
Your hair, a perfumed casque, whose memory
Revives me for the amorous embrace.

For madly I'd have kissed your noble frame,
And from your cool feet to your great black tresses
Unleashed the treasure of profound caresses,

If with a single tear that gently came
You could have quenched, O queen of all the cruel,
The blazing of your eyes, their icy fuel

XXXIII

Posthumous Remorse

When you're asleep, dear shadow-coloured wench,
Within a coal-black, marble monument:
When, for your room and mansion, you are pent
In a wet cellar and a hollow trench:

When the stone, pressing on your startled breast
And flanks in fluent suppleness competing,
Prevents your heart from wishing or from beating,
Your feet from racing on their reckless quest.

The tomb that shares my deathless recollection
(For poets best are understood by tombs)
On those long nights, when never sleep presumes,

Will say, "What boots, frail vase of imperfection,
Not to have known what pains with death begin?"—
And, like remorse, the worm will gnaw your skin.

XXXIV

The Cat

Come, my fine cat, against my loving heart;
Sheathe your sharp claws, and settle.
And let my eyes into your pupils dart
Where agate sparks with metal.

Now while my fingertips caress at leisure
Your head and wiry curves,
And that my hand's elated with the pleasure
Of your electric nerves,

I think about my woman—how her glances
Like yours, dear beast, deep-down
And cold, can cut and wound one as with lances;

Then, too, she has that vagrant
And subtle air of danger that makes fragrant
Her body, lithe and brown.

XXXV

Duel

Two fighters rushed together: sabres bleak
With crimson blood-gouts lit the air above.
That clinking swordplay was the tender squeak
Of youth, when it's a prey to bleating love.

The swords are splintered, like our youth, my darling,
And now it's teeth and talons are the fashion.
The clash of swords is child's play to the snarling
Of hearts adult in ulcerated passion.

In the ravine by lynx and leopard haunted,
Our heroes, wrestling heroes, roll undaunted.
Rags of their skin flower red upon the gorse.

This gulf is hell, and peopled by our friends.
Here, hellcat! Come, let's roll without remorse
To celebrate a feud that never ends!

XXXVI

The Balcony

Mother of memories, queen of paramours,
Yourself are all my pleasure, all my duty;
You will recall caresses that were yours
And fireside evenings in their warmth and beauty.
Mother of memories, queen of paramours.

On eves illumined by the light of coal,
The balcony beneath a rose-veiled sky,
Your breast how soft! Your heart how good and whole!
We spoke eternal things that cannot die —
On eves illumined by the light of coal!

How splendid sets the sun of a warm evening!
How deep is space! the heart how full of power!
When, queen of the adored, towards you leaning,
I breathed the perfume of your blood in flower.
How splendid sets the sun of a warm evening!

The evening like an alcove seemed to thicken,
And as my eyes astrologised your own,
Drinking your breath, I felt sweet poisons quicken,
And in my hands your feet slept still as stone.
The evening like an alcove seemed to thicken.

I know how to resuscitate dead minutes.
I see my past, its face hid in your knees.
How can I seek your languorous charm save in its
Own source, your heart and body formed to please.
I know how to resuscitate dead minutes.

These vows, these perfumes, and these countless kisses,
Reborn from gulfs that we could never sound,
Will they, like suns, once bathed in those abysses,
Rejuvenated from the deep, rebound—
These vows, these perfumes, and these countless kisses?

XXXVII

The Possessed

The sun in crêpe has muffled up his fire.
Moon of my life! Half shade yourself like him.
Slumber or smoke. Be silent and be dim,
And in the gulf of boredom plunge entire;

I love you thus! However, if you like,
Like some bright star from its eclipse emerging,
To flaunt with Folly where the crowds are surging—
Flash, lovely dagger, from your sheath and strike!

Light up your eyes from chandeliers of glass!
Light up the lustful looks of louts that pass!
Morbid or petulant, I thrill before you.

Be what you will, black night or crimson dawn;
No fibre of my body tautly-drawn,
But cries: “Beloved demon, I adore you!”

XXXVIII

A Phantom

The Shades

My fate confines me, dark and shady,
In vaults of lone unfathomed grief.
No rosy sunbeams bring relief.
Alone with Night, my grim landlady,

I'm like a painter whom God spites
To paint on shades, and cook and eat
My own poor heart, the only meat
Of my funereal appetites.

Sometimes a spectre dim, reclining
In grace and glory, can be seen.
With dreamy oriental mien.

When fully its own form defining,
I recognise who it must be,
Sombre yet luminous, it's She !

2

The Perfume

Reader, say, have you ever breathed,
With lazy greed and joy, the dusk
Of an old church with incense wreathed,
Or smelt an ancient bag of musk?

**It's by such charms the Nevermore
Intoxicates us in the Now—
As lovers to Remembrance bow
Over the bodies they adore.**

**From her thick tresses as they fume
(Scent-sack and censer of the room)
A feline, tawny perfume springs.**

**Her muslins and her velvets smooth
Give off, made pregnant with her youth,
Scents of the fur of prowling things:**

3

The Frame

**As a fine frame improves a plate
Although the graver needs no vaunting—
I know not what of strange and haunting
(From nature vast to isolate**

**Her beauty) was conferred by gems,
Metals, and gear. She mingled with them,
And swirled them all into her rhythm
As in her skirts the flouncing hemis.**

**They say she thought all things were stung
With love for her. Her naked flesh
She loved to drown in kisses fresh**

**Of flax or satin. To her clung,
In all the movements of her shape,
The childish graces of the ape.**

The Portrait

Sickness and death will form the ash and dust
Of all the fire we blazed with in such splendour,
Of those great eyes so fervent and so tender,
The mouth wherein my heart would drown its lust,

The kisses strong as marum, the delightful,
Fierce transports livelier than the solar rays.
What can remain? My soul, the truth is frightful!—
A fading sketch, a faint three-coloured haze,

Which (like myself unfriended) wanes away,
While Time, insulting dotard, every day,
Brushes it fainter with his heedless wing . . .

Killer of life and art! black, evil King!—
You'll never kill, within my soul, the story
Of that which was my rapture and my glory.

XXXIX

For you this poem: if my name should reach
Favoured by mighty gales, to far-off times,
Like a proud vessel sailing to the beach,
To stir the brains of humans with my rhymes—

Your memory, uncertain as a myth,
Will tire the reader like an endless gong,
And be a mystic, kindred chain wherewith
He'll hang suspended to my towering song:

Curs'd soul to whom (from the supernal sky
To hell's abyss) none responds but I!—
O you, who like a fleeting shadow pass.

Spurn with light foot and with serenest gaze
The stupid mortals who have grudged you praise,
O jade-eyed statue, angel browed with brass!

XL

Semper Eadem

“Whence,” ask you, “does this strange new sadness flow
Like rising tides on rocks, black, bare, and vast?”
For human hearts, when vintage-time is past,
To live is bad. That secret all men know—

An obvious sorrow, with no mystery, shown,
Clear as your joy, to everyone around.
O curious one, seek nothing more profound,
And speak not, though your voice be sweet in tone.

Hush, ignorant! Hush, soul that’s still enraptured,
And mouth of childish laughter! Neatly captured,
Death pulls us, more than life, with subtle wile.

Oh let my thought get drunk upon a lie,
And plunge, as in a dream, in either eye,
And in their lashes’ shadow sleep awhile!

XLI

All in One

The Demon called on me this morning,
In my high room. As is his way,
Thinking to catch me without warning,
He put this question: "Tell me, pray,

Of all the beauties that compose,
The strange enchantment of her ways,
Amongst the wonders black or rose,
Which object most excites your praise,

And is the climax in her litany?"
My soul, you answered the Abhorred,
"Since she is fashioned, all, of dittany,
No part is most to be adored.

Since I am ravished, I ignore a
Degree of difference in delight.
She dazzles me like the aurora
And she consoles me like the night.

The harmony's so exquisite
That governs her, it is in vain
Analysis would try to split
The unity of such a strain.

O mystic fusion that, enwreathing
My senses, fuses each in each,
To hear the music of her breathing
And breathe the perfume of her speech."

XLII

What can you say, poor lonely soul of mine,
Or you, poor heart, so long ago turned sour,
To the best, dearest, loveliest, whose divine
Regard has made you open like a flower?

We'll set our pride to sing her highest praise:
Naught to her sweet authority compares:
Her psychic flesh is formed of fragrant airs.
Her glances clothe us in a suit of rays.

Be it in solitude at dead*of night,
Or in the crowded streets of glaring light,
Her phantom like a torch before me streams.

It speaks: "I'm beautiful. These orders take.
Love naught but Beauty, always, for my sake,
Madonna, guardian Angel, Muse of dreams."

XLIII

The Living Torch

Those lit eyes go before me, in full view,
(Some cunning angel magnetised their light)—
Heavenly twins, yet my own brothers too,
Shaking their diamond blaze into my sight.

My steps from every trap or sin to save,
In the strait road of Beauty they conduct me.
They are my servants, and I am their slave,
Obedient in whatever they instruct me.

Delightful eyes, you burn with mystic rays
Like candles in broad day; red suns may blaze,
But cannot quench their still, fantastic light.

Those candles burn for death, but you for waking:
You sing the dawn that in my soul is breaking,
Stars which no sun could ever put to flight!

X L I V

Reversibility

Angel of gaiety, have you known anguish,
Shame and remorse, tears, boredom, and dismay,
Vague horrors of the nights in which we languish,
Which crumple hearts like papers thrown away?
Angel of gaiety, have you known anguish?

Angel of kindness, have you met with hate?
Fists clenched in gloom, eyes running tears of gall,
When Vengeance beats his drum to subjugate
Our faculties, the captain of them all?
Angel of kindness, have you met with hate?

Angel of health, have you beheld the Fevers?
Across pale walls of wards they limp and stumble,
Like exiles wan, with agues, chills, and shivers,
Seeking the scanty sun with lips that mumble.
Angel of health, have you beheld the Fevers?

Angel of beauty, do you know Old Age,
The fear of wrinkles, and the dire emotion,
In eyes we've pierced too long, as on a page,
To read the secret horror of devotion?
Angel of beauty do you know Old Age?

Angel of goodness, radiance, and delight,
The dying David would have begged to share
The emanations of your body bright.
But all I wish to ask of you is prayer.
Angel of goodness, radiance, and delight.

XLV

Confession

Once, and once only, kind and gentle lady,
Your polished arm on mine you placed
(Deep down within my spirit, dark and shady,
I keep the memory uneffaced).

A medal, newly-coined, of flashing silver,
The full moon shone. The night was old.,
Its solemn grandeur, like a mighty river,
Through sleeping Paris softly rolled.

Along the streets, by courtyard doors, cats darted
And passed in furtive, noiseless flight
With ears pricked; or, like shades of friends departed,
Followed us slowly through the night.

Cutting this easy intimacy through,
That hatched from out that pearly light—
O rich resounding instrument, from you,
Who'd always thrilled with loud delight,

From you, till then as joyful as a peal
Of trumpets on a sparkling morn,
A cry so plaintive that it seemed unreal,
Was staggeringly torn.

Like some misborn, deformed, and monstrous kid
Who puts his family to the blush,
Whose presence in a cellar must be hid
And his existence in a hush!

Poor angel! that harsh note was meant to sing
"That nothing in this world is certain,
And human egotism is the thing
Which all existence serves to curtain.

That it's an irksome task to be a beauty,
A boring job one has to face—
Like frigid dancers, smiling as a duty
With hard, mechanical grimace:

That building upon hearts is idiotic :
All cracks, love, beauty, and fraternity
Until Oblivion puts them in his pocket
To pawn them on to old Eternity!"

I often have recalled that moon of magic,
That languid hush on quays and marts,
And then this confidence, so grim and tragic,
In the confessional of hearts.

X L VI

Spiritual Dawn

When in the company of the Ideal
(That gnawing tooth) Dawn enters, white and pink,
The rooms of rakes—each sated beast can feel
An Angel waking through the fumes of drink.

For downcast Man, who dreams and suffers still,
The azure of the mystic heaven above,
With gulf-like vertigo, attracts his will.
So, Goddess, lucid Being of pure love,

Over the smoking wreck of feasts and scandals,
Your phantom, rosy and enchanting, flies
And still returns to my dilated eyes.

The sun has blackened out the flame of candles.
So your victorious phantom seems as one,
O blazing spirit, with the deathless Sun!

XLVII

Evening Harmony

Now comes the eve, when on its stem vibrates
Each flower, evaporating like a censer;
When sounds and scents in the dark air grow denser;
Drowsed swoon through which a mournful waltz pulsates!

Each flower evaporates as from a censer;
The fiddle like a hurt heart palpitates;
Drowsed swoon through which a mournful waltz pulsates;
The sad, grand sky grows, altar-like, immenser.

The fiddle, like a hurt heart, palpitates,
A heart that hates oblivion, ruthless censor.
The sad, grand sky grows, altar-like, immenser.
The sun in its own blood coagulates . . .

A heart that hates oblivion, ruthless censor.
The whole of the bright past resuscitates.
The sun in its own blood coagulates . . .
And, monstrance-like, your memory flames intenser!

XLVIII

The Flask

Perfumes there are which through all things can pass
And make all matter porous, even glass;
Old coffers from the Orient brought, whose locks
Grind sullenly when opening the box,

Or, in an empty house, some ancient chest,
Where time and dust and gloom were long compressed,
May yield a flask where memory survives,
And a soul flashes into future lives.

A thousand thoughts, funereal larvae, laid
Shuddering softly under palls of shade,
May suddenly their soaring wings unfold,
Stained azure, glazed with rose, or filmed with gold.

Intoxicating memory now flies
Into the dusk, and makes us close our eyes:
Vertigo draws the spirit which it grips
Towards some dark miasma of eclipse:

Beside an ancient pit he makes her fall,
Where Lazarus, sweet-scented, tears his pall
And wakes the spectral corpse of some now-cold,
Rancid, sepulchral love he knew of old.

So when I'm lost to human memory, thrown
In some old gloomy chest to lie alone,
A poor decrepit flask, cracked, abject, crusty
With dirt, opaque and sticky, damp and dusty,

I'll be your pall and shroud, beloved pest !
The witness of your venom, and its test,
Dear poison, angel-brewed with deadly art—
Life, death, and dear corrosion of my heart.

XLIX

Poisons

Wine can conceal a sordid room
In rich, miraculous disguise,
And make such porticoes arise
Out of its flushed and crimson fume
As makes the sunset in the skies.

Opium the infinite enlarges,
And lengthens all that is past measure.
It deepens time, and digs its treasure.
With sad, black raptures it o'ercharges
The soul, and surfeits it with pleasure.

Neither are worth the drug so strong
That you distil from your green eyes,
Lakes where I see my soul capsize
Head downwards: and where, in one throng,
I slake my dreams, and quench my sighs.

But to your spittle these seem naught—
It stings and burns. It steeps my thought
And spirit in oblivious gloom.
And, in its dizzy onrush caught,
Dashes it on the shores of doom.

L

Misty Sky

One would have thought your eyes were veiled in haze,
Strange eyes! (Grey, green, or azure is their gaze?)
It seems they would reflect, in each renewal,
The changing skies, dull, dreamy, fond, or cruel.

You know those days both ²warm and hazy, which
Melt into tears the hearts that they bewitch:
And when the nerves, uneasy to control,
Too-wide awake, upbraid the sleeping soul.

You, too, resemble such a lit horizon
As suns of misty seasons now bedizen . . .
As you shine out, a landscape fresh with rain
With misty sunbeams sparkling on the plain.

Dangerous girl, seductive as the weather!
Shall I adore your snows and frosts together?
In your relentless winter shall I feel
A kiss more sharp than that of ice and steel?

LI

The Cat

A fine strong gentle cat is prowling
As in his bedroom, in my brain;
So soft his voice, so smooth its strain,
That you can scarcely hear him miowling.

But should he venture to complain
Or scold, the voice is rich and deep:
And thus he manages to keep
The charm of his untroubled reign.

This voice, which seems to pearl and filter
Through my soul's inmost shady nook,
Fills me with poems, like a book,
And fortifies me, like a philtre.

His voice can cure the direst pain
And it contains the rarest raptures.
The deepest meanings, which it captures,
It needs no language to explain.

There is no bow that can so sweep
That perfect instrument, my heart:
Or make more sumptuous music start
From its most vibrant cord and deep,

Than can the voice of this strange elf,
This cat, bewitching and seraphic,
Subtly harmonious in his traffic
With all things else, and with himself.

So sweet a perfume seems to swim
Out of his fur both brown and bright,
I nearly was embalmed one night
From (only once) caressing him.

Familiar Lar of where I stay,
He rules, presides, inspires and teaches
All things to which his empire reaches.
Perhaps he is a god, or fay.

•When to a cherished cat my gaze
Is magnet-drawn and then returns
Back to itself, it there discerns,
With strange excitement and amaze,

Deep down in my own self, the rays
Of living opals, torch-like gleams
And pallid fire of eyes, it seems,
That fixedly return my gaze.

LII

The Splendid Ship

Oh soft enchantress, I'll record with truth
The diverse beauties that adorn your youth.

Yes, I will paint your charm
Of womanhood with childhood arm in arm.

When you go sweeping your wide skirts, to me
You seem a splendid ship that out to sea

Spreads its full sails, and with them
Goes rolling in a soft, slow, lazy rhythm.

Over your tall, round neck and those plump shoulders
Your head swans forth its pride to all beholders,

With grace triumphant, mild,
And strange, you go your way, majestic child.

Oh soft enchantress, I'll record with truth
The diverse beauties that adorn your youth.

Yes, I will paint your charm
Of womanhood with childhood arm in arm.

Your bosom juts and stretches every stitch,
Triumphant bosom, like a coffer rich
With bosses round and rare,
Like shields that draw the lightning from the air.

Provoking shields, with rosy points uplifted!
Coffer of secret charms, superbly gifted,

Whose scents, liqueurs, and wine
Turn heart and brain deliriously thine.

When you go sweeping your wide skirts, to me
You seem a splendid ship that out to sea
 Spreads its full sails, and with them
Goes rolling in a soft, slow, lazy rhythm.

Your noble thighs, beneath the silks they swirl,
Torment obscure desires and tease me, girl;
 Like sorcerers they are
That stir black philtres in a deep, cool jar.

Your arms precocious Hercules would grace
And vie with pythons in their bright embrace:
 The pressure they impart
Would print your lovers' image on your heart.

Over your tall, round neck and those plump shoulders,
Your head swans forth its pride to all beholders,
 With grace triumphant, mild,
And strange, you go your way, majestic child.

LIII

Invitation to the Voyage

My daughter, my sister,
Consider the vista
Of living out there, you and I.
To love at our leisure,
Then, ending our pleasure,
In climes you resemble to die.
There the suns, rainy-wet,
Through clouds rise and set
With the selfsame enchantment to charm me
That my senses receive
From your eyes, that deceive,
When they shine through your tears to disarm me

There'll be nothing but beauty, wealth, pleasure,
With all things in order and measure.

With old treasures furnished,
By centuries burnished,
To gleam in the shade of our chamber,
While the rarest of flowers
Vaguely mix through the hours
Their own with the perfume of amber:
Each sumptuous ceiling,
Each mirror revealing
The wealth of the East, will be hung
So the part and the whole
May speak to the soul
In its native, indigenous tongue.

There'll be nothing but beauty, wealth, pleasure,
With all things in order and measure.

On the channels and streams
See each vessel that dreams
In its whimsical vagabond way,
Since its for your least whim
The oceans they swim
From the ends of the night and the day.
The sun, going down,
With its glory will crown
Canals, fields, and cities entire,
While the whole earth is rolled
In the jacinth and gold
Of its warming and radiant fire.

There'll be nothing but beauty, wealth, pleasure
With all things in order and measure.

LIV

The Irreparable

How can we choke the old and long Remorse
Which lives, and squirms, and fights
And feeds on us as worms upon a corse,
Or, on the oak, its mites?
How can we choke the old and long Remorse?

What subtle philtre, wine, or drowsy draught
Will drown ~~th~~ ancient foe,
Greedy as whores in his disastrous craft,
Ant-patient, sure, and slow?
What subtle philtre, wine or drowsy draught?

Lovely enchantress, if you know it, say
To this soul whelmed with woes,
Dying, whom loads of wounded crush to clay
Under the horses' shoes:
Lovely enchantress, if you know it, say

To this poor moribund, while wolves yet stalk him
And ravens croak his doom,
To this spent soldier say if fate will baulk him
Even of a cross or tomb—
Say to this moribund, while wolves yet stalk him!

Can this black muddy sky be ever lighted,
The shades be ever torn,
Denser than pitch, to day and dusk benighted,
To lightning, stars, or morn?
Can this black muddy sky be ever lighted?

The candle Hope that shows the Inn to strangers
Is blown out, snuffed, and melted.
Lacking both moon and glimmer, how shall rangers
Of evil roads be sheltered?
The devil snuffed the light that burned for strangers.

Sweet witch, do you love spirits lost to grace?
Whose sins are not remitted?
Say, do you know Remorse, with venom'd face,
By whom our hearts are spitted?
Sweet witch, do you love spirits lost to grace?

The Irreparable gnaws us where it lurks
And for our soul's defacement,
As on a monument the termite, works
Up from the very basement.
The Irreparable gnaws us where it lurks.

In tawdry theatres I've sometimes seen
How, to the blare of brasses,
Miraculous, to light some hellish scene,
Like dawn, a fairy passes;
In tawdry theatres I've often seen

That by this fay of light, and gold, and gauzes,
Some monstrous fiend is slain.
But my heart knows no raptures or applauses—
A leapit where, in vain,
One waits, and waits the creature winged with gauzes.

LV

Conversation

You're like an autumn sky, rose, clear, and placid.
But sorrow whelms me, like the tide's assault,
And ebbing, leaves upon my lips the acid
And muddy-bitter memory of its salt.

Your hand may stroke my breast, but not console.
What it seeks there is but a hole, deep caverned
By women's claws and fangs, and ransacked whole.
Seek not my heart, on which the beasts have ravened.

My heart's a palace plundered by the rabble:
They tope, they kill, in blood and guts they scrabble:
—A perfume swims around your naked breast!

O Beauty, flail of spirits, you know best!
With your eyes' fire, lit up as for a spree,
Char the poor rags those beasts have left of me!

LVI

Song of Autumn

I

Soon into frozen shades, like leaves, we'll tumble.
Adieu, short summer's blaze, that shone to mock
I hear already the funereal rumble
Of logs, as on the paving-stones they shock.

Winter will enter in my soul to dwell—
Rage, hate, fear, horror, labour forced and dire!
My heart will seem, to sun that polar hell,
A dim, red, frozen block, devoid of fire.

Shuddering I hear the heavy thud of fuel.
The building of a gallows sounds as good!
My spirit, like a tower, reels to the cruel
Battering-ram in every crash of wood.

The ceaseless echoes rock me and appal.
They're nailing up a coffin, I'll be bound,
For whom?—Last night was Summer. Here's the Fall.
There booms a farewell volley in the sound.

II

I like the greenish light in your long eyes,
Dear: but today all things are sour to me.
And naught, your hearth, your boudoir, nor your sighs
Are worth the sun that glitters on the sea.

Yet love me, tender heart, as mothers cherish
A thankless wretch. Lover or sister, be
Ephemeral sweetness of the suns that perish
Or glory of the autumn swift to flee.

Brief task! The charnel yawns in hunger horrid,
Yet let me with my head upon your knees,
Although I mourn the summer, white and torrid
Taste these last yellow rays before they freeze.

LVII

To a Madonna

(Ex Voto in Spanish Style)

I'd build, Madonna, love, for my belief,
An altar in the dim crypt of my grief,
And in the darkest corner of my heart,
I rom mortal lust and mockery far apart,
Scoop you a niche, with gold and azure glaze,
Where you would stand in wonderment and gaze,
With my pure verses trellised, and all round
In constellated rhymes of crystal bound:
And with a huge tiara richly crowned.
Out of the Jealousy which rules my passion,
Mortal Madonna. I a cloak would fashion,
Barbarous, stiff, and heavy with my doubt,
Whereon as in a fourm you would fill out
And mould your lair. Of tears, not pearls, would be
The sparkle of its rich embroidery:
Your robe would be my lust, with waving flow,
Poising on tips, in valleys lying low,
And clothing, in one kiss, coral and snow.
In my Respect (for satin) you'd be shod
Which your white feet would humble to the clod,
While prisoning their flesh with tender hold
It kept their shape imprinted like a mould.
If for a footstool to support your shoon,
For all my art, I could not get the moon,
I'd throw the serpent, that devours my vitals
Under your trampling heels for his requitals,
Victorious queen, to spurn, bruise, and belittle
That monstrous worm blown-up with hate and spittle.
Round you my thoughts like candles should be seen

Around the flowered shrine of the virgins' Queen,
Reflected on a roof that's painted blue,
And aiming all their golden eyes at you.
Since nought is in me that you do not stir,
All will be incense, benjamin, and myrrh,
And up to you, white peak, in clouds will soar
My stormy soul, in rapture, to adore.

In fine, your role of Mary to perfect
And mingle barbarism with respect—
Of seven deadly sins, O black delight!
Remorseful torturer, to show my sleight,
I'll forge and sharpen seven deadly swords
And like a callous juggler on the boards,
Taking it for my target, I would dart
Them deep into your streaming, sobbing heart.

L VIII

Song of Afternoon

Though your eyebrows' wicked slant
Give you an intriguing air
Which the angels do not share
Sorceress, whose eyes enchant—

My passion, terrible yet gay,
With all my heart I bow before you,
With that devotion to adore you
That priests to sacred idols pay.

Deserts and woods embalmed your hair,
Its movements give your head the stigma
Of sphinx-like secret and enigma,
Both in its attitude and air.

As round a censer vapours form,
About your flesh the perfumes wander.
The selfsame charms you seem to squander
As does an evening, dark yet warm,

The strongest philtres cannot craze
As does your indolent address
And you have mastered a caress
Dead corpses from their tombs to raise.

Your hips are amorous of your breast
And of your back: your languorous pose
Enchants the cushions where you doze
When in their depths you make your nest.

Sometimes in order to appease
Mysterious rages in your soul,
You bite and kiss without control.
Then with a mocking laugh you tease

My heart, brown beauty, tearing it:
Then over it the light is strewn
Of your eye, softer than the moon,
Till with its glance my soul is lit.

Underneath your satin 'shoes,
And underneath your silken feet,
My joy, my fate, my genius meet
To strew the pathway of my muse.

My soul is healed, restored and made complete
By you, all colour, warmth, and light,
In my Siberia a bright
Explosion as of tropic heat.

LIX

Sisina

Picture Diana, gallantly arrayed,
Ranging the woods, elated with the chase,
With flying hair and naked breasts displayed,
Defying fleetest horsemen with her pace.

Know you Theroigne whom blood and fire exalt,
Hounding a shoeless rabble to the fray,
Up royal stairways heading the assault,
And mounting, sword in hand, to show the way?

Such is Sisina. Terrible her arms.
But charity restrains her killing charms.
Though rolling drums and scent of powder madden

Her courage,—laying by its pikes and spears,
For those who merit, her scorched heart will sadden,
And open, in its depth, a well of tears.

LX

Praises of my Francisca

(Verses to a learned and devout Millener)

Upon new chords of you I sing.
And the new-born bud you bring
From solitude, the pure heart's Spring.

Your brows should be with garlands twined.
Woman of delightful mind,
Who our trespasses unbind.

As the wondrous balm of Lethe,
Through thy kisses, I will breathe thee.
All are magnetised who see thee.

When my vices, wild and stormy,
From my wonted courses bore me
It was You appeared before me,

Star of Oceans! you that alter
Courses, when the pilots falter—
Take my heart upon your altar.

Cistern full of virtuous ruth,
Fountain of eternal youth,
Give to dumbness speech and truth!

What was dirty, you cremated,
What uneven—you equated,
What was weak you re-created.

**Inn, on the hungry roads I tramp,
And, in the dark, a guiding lamp
To steer the lost one back to camp.**

**'To my strength add strength, O sweet
Bath, where scents and unguents meet!
Anoint me for some peerless feat!**

**Holy water most seraphic,
On the lusts in which I traffic
Flash your chastity ecstatic.**

**Bowl of gems where radiance dances.
Salt that the holy bread enhances,
And sacred wine—your name is Frances!**

LXI

To a Colonial Lady

In scented countries by the sun caressed
I've known, beneath a tent of purple boughs,
And palmtrees shedding slumber as they drowse,
A creole lady with a charm unguessed.

She's pale, and warm, and duskily beguiling;
Nobility is moulded in her neck;
Slender and tall she holds herself in check;
An huntress born, sure-eyed, and quiet-smiling.

Should you go, Madam, to the land of glory
Along the Seine or Loire, where you would merit
To ornament some mansion famed in story,

Your eyes would burn in those deep-shaded parts,
And breed a thousand rhymes in poets' hearts.
Tamed like the negro slaves that you inherit.

LXII

Moesta et Errabunda

Agatha, does your heart rise up and fly,
Far from the city's black and sordid sea
Towards a sea that's blue as any sky,
And clear and deep as pure virginity?
Agatha, does your heart rise up and fly?

The sea, the mighty sea, consoles our labour.
What demon taught the sea with raucous verse
To choir the organ which the winds belabour
And lullaby our sorrows like a nurse?
The sea, the mighty sea, consoles our labour.

Train, bear me; take me, ship, to other climes!
Far, far! For here the mud is made of tears.
—Does Agatha's sad heart not say, at times,
"Far from remorses, sorrows, crimes, and fears,
Train, bear me; take me, ship, to other climes"?

How distant is that perfumed paradise!
Where all is joy and love with azure crowned,
Where all one loves is truly worth the price,
And hearts in pure voluptuousness are drowned.
How distant is that perfumed paradise!

But the green paradise of childish love,
Of races, songs, and kisses, and bouquets,
Of fiddles shrilling in the hills above,
And jars of wine, and woods, and dying rays—
But the green paradise of childish love,

**Innocent paradise of furtive joys,
Is it far off as India or Hong Kong?
Could it be conjured by a plaintive voice
Or animated by a silver song—
That far off paradise of furtive joys?**

LXIII

The Ghost

Like angels fierce and tawny-eyed,
Back to your chamber I will glide,
And noiselessly into your sight
Steal with the shadows of the night.

And I will bring you, brown delight,
Kisses as cold as lunar night
And the caresses of a snake
Revolving in a grave. At break

Of morning in its livid hue,
You'd find I had bequeathed to you
An empty place as cold as stone.

Others by tenderness and ruth
Would reign over your life and youth,
But I would rule by fear alone.

LXIV

Autumn Sonnet

Your eyes like crystal ask me, clear and mute,
"In me, strange lover, what do you admire?"
Be lovely: hush: my heart, whom all things tire
Except the candour of the primal brute,

Would hide from you the secret burning it
And its black legend written out in fire,
O soother of the sleep that I respire!
Passion I hate, and I am hurt by wit.

Let us love gently. In his lair laid low,
Ambushed in shades, Love strings his fatal bow.
I know his ancient arsenal complete,

Crime, horror, lunacy—O my pale daisy!
Are we not suns in Autumn, silver-hazy,
O my so white, so snow-cold Marguerite?

LXV

Sorrow of the Moon

More drowsy dreams the moon tonight. She rests
Like a proud beauty on heaped cushions pressing,
With light and absent-minded touch caressing,
Before she sleeps, the contour of her breasts.

On satin-shimmering, downy avalanches
She dies from swoon to swoon in languid change,
And lets her eyes on snowy visions range
That in the azure rise like flowering branches.

When sometimes to this earth her languor calm
Lets streak a stealthy tear, a pious poet,
The enemy of sleep, in his cupped palm,

Takes this pale tear, of liquid opal spun
With rainbow lights, deep in his heart to stow it
Far from the staring eyeballs of the Sun.

LXVI

Cats

Sages austere and fervent lovers both,
In their ripe season, cherish cats, the pride
Of hearths, strong, mild, and to themselves allied
In chilly stealth and sedentary sloth.

Friends both to lust and learning, they frequent
Silence, and love the horror darkness breeds.
Erebus would have chosen them for steeds
To hearse, could their pride to it have bent.

Dreaming, the noble postures they assume
Of sphinxes stretching out into the gloom
That seems to swoon into an endless trance.

Their fertile flanks are full of sparks that tingle,
And particles of gold, like grains of shingle,
Vaguely be-star their pupils as they glance.

LXVII

The Owls

Within the shelter of black yews
The owls in ranks are ranged apart
Like foreign gods, whose eyeballs dart
Red fire. They meditate and muse.

Without a stir they will remain
Till, in its melancholy hour,
Thrusting the level sun from power,
The shade establishes its reign.

Their attitude instructs the sage,
Content with what is near at hand,
To shun all motion, strife, and rage.

Men, crazed with shadows that they chase,
Bear, as a punishment, the brand
Of having wished to change their place.

LXVIII

The Author's Pipe

I am an author's pipe. To see me
And my outlandish shape to heed,
You'd know my master was a dreamy
Inveterate smoker of the weed.

When he is loaded down with care,
I like a stove will smoke and burn
Wherein the supper they prepare
Against the labourer's return.

I nurse his spirit with my charm
Swaying it in a soft, uncertain,
And vaguely-moving azure curtain.

I roll a potent cloud of balm
To lull his spirit into rest
And cure the sorrows in his breast.

LIX

Music

Music uplifts me like the sea and races
Me to my distant star,
Through veils of mist or through ethereal spaces,
I sail on it afar.

With chest flung out and lungs like sails inflated
Into the depth of night
I escalate the backs of waves serrated,
That darkness veils from sight.

I feel vibrating in me the emotions
That storm-tossed ships must feel.
The fair winds and the tempests and the oceans

Sway my exultant keel.
Sometimes a vast, dead calm with glassy stare
Mirrors my dumb despair.

LXX

The Burial of an Accursed Poet

If on a night obscure and deep,
Some decent Christian, out of ruth,
Buries behind some garbage-heap
The vaunted body of your youth :

There, when the chaster stars have set
And the moon her hammock slung
Will the spider weave his net
And the adder hatch her young.

Your cursèd head beneath the ground
Will hear, through all the seasons then,
The dismal cries of wolves resound,

Old half-starved witches raising spooks,
The antics of obscene old men,
And black conspiracies of crooks.

LXXI

Fantastic Engraving

A monstrous spectre carries on his forehead,
And at a rakish tilt, grotesquely horrid,
A crown such as at carnivals parade.
Without a whip or spur he rides a jade,
A phantom-like apocalyptic moke,
Whose nostrils seen with rabid froth to smoke.
Across unbounded space the couple moves
Spurning infinity with reckless hooves.
The horseman waves a sword that lights the gloom
Of nameless crowds he tramples to their doom,
And, like a prince his mansion, goes inspecting
The graveyard, which, no skyline intersecting,
Contains, beneath a sun that's white and bleak,
Peoples of history, modern and antique.

LXXII

The Joyous Dead

In a fat, greasy soil, that's full of snails,
I'll dig a grave deep down, where I may sleep
Spreading my bones at ease, to drowse in deep
Oblivion, as a shark within the wave.

I hate all tombs, and testaments, and wills :
I want no human tears ; I'd like it more,
That ravens could attack me with their bills,
To broach my carcase of its living gore.

O worms ! black friends, who cannot hear or see
A free and joyous corpse behold in me !
You philosophic souls, corruption-bred,

Plough through my ruins ! eat your merry way !
And if there are yet further torments, say,
For this old soulless corpse among the dead.

LXXIII

The Cask of Hate

The Cask of the pale Danaïds is Hate.
Vainly Revenge, with red strong arms employed,
Precipitates her buckets, in a spate
Of blood and tears, to feed the empty void.

The Fiend bores secret holes to these abyssms
By which a thousand years of sweat and strain
Escape, though she'd revive their organisms
In order just to bleed them once again.

Hate is a drunkard in a tavern staying,
Who feels his thirst born of its very cure,
Like Lerna's hydra, multiplied by slaying.

Gay drinkers of their conqueror are sure,
And Hate is doomed to a sad fate, unable
Ever to fall and snore beneath the table.

LXXIV

The Cracked Bell

It's sweet and bitter, of a winter night,
To hear, beside the crackling, smoking log,
Far memories prepare themselves for flight
To carillons that sound amid the fog.

Happy's the bell whose vigorous throat on high,
In spite of time, is sound and still unspent,
To hurl his faithful and religious cry
Like an old soldier watching in his tent.

My soul is cracked, and when amidst its care
It tries with song to fill the frosty air,
Sometimes, its voice seems like the feeble croak

A wounded soldier makes, lost in the smoke,
Beneath a pile of dead, in bloody mire,
Trying, with fearful efforts, to expire.

LXXV

Spleen

The Month of Rains, incensed at life, outpours
Out of her urn, a dark chill, like a penance,
Over the graveyards and their wan, grey tenants
And folk in foggy suburbs out of doors.

My cat seeks out a litter on the ground
Twitching her scrawny body flecked with mange.
The soul of some old poet seems to range
The gutter, with a chill phantasmal sound.

The big bell tolls: damp hearth-logs seem to mock,
Whistling, the sniffle-snuffle of the clock,
While in the play of odours stale with must,

Reminders of a dropsical old crone,
The knave of hearts and queen of spades alone
Darkly discuss a passion turned to dust.

LXXVI

Spleen

I have more memories than had I seen
Ten centuries. A huge chest that has been
Stuffed full of writs, bills, verses, balance-sheets
With golden curls wrapt up in old receipts
And love-letters—hides less than my sad brain,
A pyramid, a vault that must contain
More corpses than the public charnel stores.

I am a cemetery the moon abhors,
Where, like remorses, the long worms that trail
Always the dearest of my dead assail.
I am a boudoir full of faded roses
Where many an old outmoded dress reposes
And faded pastels and pale Bouchers only
Breathe a scent-flask, long-opened and left lonely . .

Nothing can match those limping days for length
Where under snows of years, grown vast in strength,
Boredom (of listlessness the pale abortion)
Of immortality takes the proportion!
—From henceforth, living matter, you are nought
But stone surrounded by a dreadful thought:
Lost in some dim Sahara, an old Sphinx,
Of whom the world we live in never thinks.
Lost on the map, it is its surly way
Only to sing in sunset's fading ray.

LXXVII

Spleen

I'm like the King of some damp, rainy clime,
Grown impotent and old before my time,
Who scorns the bows and scrapings of his teachers
And bores himself with hounds and all such creatures.
Naught can amuse him, falcon, steed, or chase :
No, not the mortal plight of his whole race
Dying before his balcony. The tune,
Sung to this tyrant by his pet buffoon,
Irks him. His couch seems far more like a grave.
Even the girls, for whom all kings seem brave,
Can think no toilet up, nor shameless rig,
To draw a smirk from this funereal prig.
The sage who makes him gold, could never find
The baser element that rots his mind.
Even those blood-baths the old Romans knew
And later thugs have imitated too,
Can't warm this skeleton to deeds of slaughter,
Whose only blood is Lethe's cold, green water.

LXXVIII

Spleen

When the cold heavy sky weighs like a lid
On spirits whom eternal boredom grips,
And the wide ring of the horizon's hid
In daytime darker than the night's eclipse :

When the world seems a dungeon, damp and small,
Where hope flies like a bat, in circles reeling,
Beating his timid wings against the wall
And dashing out his brains against the ceiling :

When trawling rains have made their steel-grey fibres
Look like the grilles of some tremendous jail,
And a whole nation of disgusting spiders
Over our brains their dusty cobwebs trail :

Suddenly bells are fiercely clanged about
And hurl a fearsome howl into the sky
Like spirits from their country hunted out
Who've nothing else to do but shriek and cry--

Then long processions without fifes or drums
Wind slowly through my soul. Hope, weeping, bows
To conquest. And atrocious Anguish comes
To plant his black flag on my drooping brows.

LXXIX

Obsession

You forests, like cathedrals, are my dread:
You roar like organs. Our curst hearts, like cells
Where death forever rattles on the bed,
Echo your *de Profundis* as it swells.

My spirit hates you, Ocean! sees, and loathes
Its tumults in your own. Of men defeated
The bitter laugh, that's full of sobs and oaths,
Is in your own tremendously repeated.

How you would please me, Night! without your stars
Which speak a foreign dialect, that jars
On one who seeks the void, the black, the bare.

Yet even your darkest shade a canvas forms
Whereon my eye must multiply in swarms
Familiar looks of shapes no longer there.

LXXX

The Thirst for the Void

My soul, you used to love the battle's rumble.
Hope, whose sharp spur once kindled you like flame,
Will mount on you no more. Rest, without shame,
Old charger, since at every step you stumble.

Sleep now the sleep of brutes, proud heart: be humble.

O broken raider, for your outworn mettle,
Love has no joys, no fight is worth disputing.
Farewell to all the trumpeting and fluting!
Pleasure, have done, when brooding shadows settle,

The blooms of spring are vanquished by the nettle.

As snows devour stiff corpses in their welter,
Time wolfs my soul in, minute after minute.
I've seen the world and everything that's in it,
And I no longer seek in it for shelter;

Come, Avalanche! and sweep me helter-skelter.

LXXXI

Alchemy of Sorrow

One puts all nature into mourning,
One lights her like a flaring sun—
What whispers “Burial” to the one
Cries to the other, “Life and Morning”.

The unknown Hermes who assists
The role of Midas to reverse,
And makes me by a subtle curse
The saddest of all alchemists—

By him, my paradise to hell,
And gold to slag, is changed too well.
The clouds are winding-sheets, and I,

Bidding some dear-loved corpse farewell,
Along the shore-line of the sky,
Erect my vast sarcophagi.

LXXXII

Sympathetic Horror

From livid skies that, without end,
As stormy as your future roll,
What thoughts into your empty soul
(Answer me, libertine!) descend?

—Insatiable yet for all
That turns on darkness, doom, or dice,
I'll not, like Ovid, mourn my fall,
Chased from the Latin paradise.

Skies, torn like seacoasts by the storm!
In you I see my pride take form,
And the huge clouds that rush in streams

Are the black hearses of my dreams,
And your red rays reflect the hell,
In which my heart is pleased to dwell.

LXXXIII

Heautontimoroumenos

TO J. G. F.

I'll strike you, but without the least
Anger—as butchers poll an ox,
Or Moses, when he struck the rocks—
That from your eyelid thus released,

The lymph of suffering may brim
To slake my desert of its drought.
So my desire, by hope made stout,
Upon your salty tears may swim,

Like a proud ship, far out from shore.
Within my heart, which they'll confound
With drunken joy, your sobs will sound
Like drums that beat a charge in war.

Am I not a faulty chord
In all this symphony divine,
Thanks to the irony malign
That shakes and cuts me like a sword?

It's in my voice, the raucous jade!
It's in my blood's black venom too!
I am the looking-glass, wherethrough
Megara sees herself portrayed!

I am the wound, and yet the blade!
The smock, and yet the cheek that takes it!
The limb, and yet the wheel that breaks it,
The torturer, and he who's flayed!

**One of the sort whom all revile,
A Vampire, my own blood I quaff,
Condemned to an eternal laugh
Because I know not how to smile.**

LXXXIV

The Irremediable

I.

A Form, Idea, or Essence, chased
Out of the azure sky, and shot
Into a leaden Styx where not
A star can pierce the muddy waste :

An angel, rash explorer, who,
Tempted by love of strange deformity,
Caught in a nightmare of enormity,
Fights like a swimmer, wrestling through

A monstrous whorl of eddying spume,
In deathly anguish, from him flinging
The wave that, like an idiot singing,
Goes pirouetting through the gloom :

A wretch enchanted, who, to flee
A den of serpents, gropes about
In desperation vain, without
Discovering a match or key :

A damnèd soul, who, with no lamp,
Stands by a gulf, whose humid scent
Betrays the depth of the descent
Of endless stairs without a ramp,

Where slimy monsters watch the track
Whose eyeballs phosphoresce and glow
Only to make the night more black
And nought except themselves to show :

A vessel that the pole betrays,
Caught in a crystal trap all round,
And seeking by what fatal sound
It ever entered such a maze :—

Clear emblems ! measuring the level
Of irremediable dooms,
Which make us see how well the Devil
Performs whatever he presumes !

II.

Strange *tête-à-tête* ! the heart, its own .
Mirror, its own confession hears !
Deep well where Truth is trembling shown
And like a livid star appears,

Ironic beacon and infernal
Torch of satanic grace, but still
Sole glory and relief eternal,
—Conscience that operates in Ill !

LXXXV

The Clock

The Clock, calm evil god, that makes us shiver,
With threatening finger warns us each apart:—
“*Remember!* Soon the vibrant woes will quiver,
Like arrows in a target, in your heart.

To the horizon Pleasure will take flight
As flits a vaporous sylphide to the wings.
Each instant gnaws a crumb of the delight
That for his season every mortal brings.

Three thousand times and more, each hour, the second
Whispers ‘*Remember!*’ Like an insect shrill
The present chirps, ‘With Nevermore I’m reckoned.
I’ve pumped your lifeblood with my loathsome bill.’

Remember! Souviens-toi! Esto Memor!
My brazen windpipe speaks in every tongue.
Each moment, foolish mortal, is like ore
From which the precious metal must be wrung.

Remember. Time the gamester (it’s the law)
Wins always, without cheating. Daylight wanes.
Night deepens. The abyss with gulpy maw
Thirsts on unsated, while the hour-glass drains.

Sooner or later, now, the time must be
When Hazard, Virtue (your still-virgin mate),
Repentance, (your last refuge), or all three—
Will tell you, ‘Die, old Coward. It’s too late!’ ”

TABLEAUX PARISIENS

LXXXVI

The Landscape

More chasteness to my eclogues it would give,
Sky-high, like old astrologers to live,
A neighbour of the belfries: and to hear
Their solemn hymns along the winds career.
High in my attic, chin in hand, I'd swing
And watch the workshops as they roar and sing,
The city's masts—each steeple, tower, and flue—
And skies that bring eternity to view.

Sweet, through the mist, to see illumed again
Stars through the azure, lamps behind the pane,
Rivers of carbon irrigate the sky,
And the pale moon pour magic from on high.
I'd watch three seasons passing by, and then
When winter came with dreary snows, I'd pen
Myself between closed shutters, bolts, and doors,
And build my fairy palaces indoors.

A dream of blue horizons I would garble
With thoughts of fountains weeping on to marble,
Of gardens, kisses, birds that ceaseless sing,
And all the Idyll holds of childhood's spring.
The riots, brawling past my window-pane,
From off my desk would not divert my brain.
Because I would be plunged in pleasure still,
Conjuring up the Springtime with my will,
And forcing sunshine from my heart to form,
Of burning thoughts, an atmosphere that's warm.

LXXXVII

The Sun

Along the outskirts where, close-sheltering
Hid lusts, delapidated shutters swing,
When the sun strikes, redoubling waves of heat
On town, and field, and roof, and dusty street—
I prowl to air my prowess and kill time,
Stalking, in likely nooks, the odds of rhyme,
Tripping on words like cobbles as I go
And bamping into lines dreamed long ago.

This all-providing Sire, foe to chloroses,
Wakes verses in the fields as well as roses
Evaporates one's cares into the breeze,
Filling with honey brains and hives of bees,
Rejuvenating those who go on crutches
And bringing youthful joy to all he touches,
Life to those precious harvests he imparts
That grow and ripen in our deathless hearts.

Poet-like, through the town he seems to smile
Ennobling fate for all that is most vile;
And king-like, without servants or display,
Through hospitals and mansions makes his way.

The Red-Haired Beggar Girl

White girl with flame-red hair,
Whose garments, here and there,
Give poverty to view,
And beauty too.

To me, poor puny poet,
Your body, as you show it,
With freckles on your arms,
Has yet its charms.

You wear with prouder mien
Than in Romance a queen
Her velvet buskins could—
Your clogs of wood.

In place of tatters short
Let some rich robe of court
Swirl with its silken wheels
After your heels :

In place of stockings holed
A dagger made of gold,
To light the lecher's eye,
Flash on your thigh :

Let ribbons slip their bows
And for our sins disclose
A breast whose radiance vies
Even with your eyes.

To show them further charms
Let them implore your arms,
And these, rebuking, humble
Fingers that fumble

With proffered pearls aglow
And sonnets of Belleau,
Which, fettered by your beauty,
They yield in duty.

Rifraff of scullion-rhymers
Would dedicate their primers
Under the stairs to view
Only your shoe.

Each page-boy lucky-starred,
Each marquis, each Ronsard
Would hang about your bower
To while an hour.

You'd count, among your blisses,
Than lilies far more kisses,
And boast, among your flames,
Some royal names.

Yet now your beauty begs
For scraps on floors, and dregs
Else destined to the gutter,
As bread and butter.

You eye, with longing tense,
Cheap gauds for thirty cents,
Which, pardon me, these days
I cannot raise.

No scent, or pearl, or stone,
But nothing save your own
Thin nudity for dower,
Pass on, my flower!

LXXXIX

The Swan TO VICTOR HUGO

I.

Andromache!—This shallow stream, the brief
Mirror you once so grandly overcharged
With your vast majesty of widowed grief,
This lying Simois your tears enlarged,

Evoked your name, and made me think of you,
As I was crossing the new Carrousel.
—Old Paris is no more (cities renew,
Quicker than human hearts, their changing spell).

In mind I see that camp of huts, the muddle
Of rough-hewn roofs and leaning shafts for miles,
The grass, green logs stagnating in the puddle,
Where bric-a-brac lay glittering in piles.

Once a menagerie parked there. And there
It chanced one morning, when from slumber freed,
Labour stands up, and Transport through still air
Rumbles its sombre hurricane of speed,—

A swan escaped its cage: and as its feet
With finny palms on the harsh pavement scraped,
Trailing white plumage on the stony street,
In the dry gutter for fresh water gaped.

Nervously bathing in the dust, in wonder
It asked, remembering its native stream,
“When will the rain come down? When roll the thunder?”
I see it now, strange myth and fatal theme!

Sometimes, like Ovid's wretch, towards the sky
(Ironically blue with cruel smile)
Its neck, convulsive, reared its head on high
As though it were its Maker to revile.

II

Paris has changed, but in my grief no change.
New palaces and scaffoldings and blocks,
To me, are allegories, nothing strange.
My memories are heavier than rocks.

Passing the Louvre, one image makes me sad:
That swan, like other exiles that we knew,
Grandly absurd, with gestures of the mad,
Gnawed by one craving!—Then I think of you,

Who fell from your great husband's arms, to be
A beast of freight for Pyrrhus, and for life,
Bowed by an empty tomb in ecstacy—
Great Hector's widow! Helenus's wife!

I think, too, of the starved and phthisic negress
Tramping the mud, who seeks, with haggard eye,
The palms of Africa, and for some egress
Out of this great black wall of foggy sky:

Of those who've lost what they cannot recover:
Of those who slake with tears their lonely hours
And milk the she-wolf, Sorrow, for their mother:
And skinny orphans withering like flowers.

So in the forest of my soul's exile,
Remembrance winds his horn as on he rides.
I think of sailors stranded on an isle,
Captives, and slaves—and many more besides.

XC

The Seven Old Men

TO VICTOR HUGO

Ant-seething city, city full of dreams,
Where ghosts by daylight tug the passer's sleeve.
Mystery, like sap, through all its conduit-streams,
Quickeneth the dread Colossus that they weave.

One early morning, in the street's sad mud,
Whose houses, by the fog increased in height,
Seemed wharves along a riverside in flood:
When with a scene to match the actor's plight,

Foul yellow mist had filled the whole of space:
Steeling my nerves to play a hero's part,
I coaxed my weary soul with me to pace
The backstreets shaken by each lumbering cart.

A wretch appeared whose tattered, yellow clothing,
Matching the colour of the raining skies,
Could make it shower down alms—but for the loathing
Malevolence that glittered in his eyes.

The pupils of his eyes, with bile injected,
Seemed with their glance to make the frost more raw.
Stiff as a sword, his long red beard projected,
Like that of Judas, level with his jaw.

He was not bent, but broken, with the spine
Forming a sharp right-angle to the straight,
So that his stick, to finish the design,
Gave him the stature and the crazy gait

Of a three-footed Jew, or crippled hound.
He plunged his soles into the slush as though
To crush the dead; and to the world around
Seemed less of an indifferent than a foe.

His image followed him, (back, stick, and beard
In nothing differed) spawned from the same hole,
A centenarian twin. Both spectres steered
With the same gait to the same unknown goal.

To what foul plot was I exposed? of what
Humiliating hazard made the jeer?
For seven times, (I counted) was begot
This sinister, self multiplying fear!

Let him mark well who laughs at my despair
With no fraternal shudder in reply . . .
Those seven loathsome monsters had the air,
Though rotting through, of what can never die.

Disgusting Phoenix, his own sire and father!
Could I have watched an eighth instalment spawn
Ironic, fateful, grim—nor perished rather?
But from that hellish *cortège*, I'd withdrawn.

Perplexed as drunkards when their sight is doubled,
I locked my room, sick, fevered, chilled with fright:
With all my spirit sorely hurt and troubled
By so ridiculous yet strange a sight.

Vainly my reason for the helm was striving:
The tempest of my efforts made a scorn.
My soul like a dismasted wreck went driving
Over a monstrous sea without a bourn.

XCI

The Little Old Women

TO VICTOR HUGO

I

In sinuous folds of cities old and grim,
Where all things, even horror, turn to grace,
I follow, in obedience to my whim,
Strange, feeble, charming creatures round the place.

These crooked freaks were women in their pride,
Fair Eponine or Laïs ! Humped and bent,
Love them ! Because they still have souls inside.
Under their draughty skirts in tatters rent,

They crawl : a vicious wind their carrion rides ;
From the deep roar of traffic see them cower,
Pressing like precious relics to their sides
Some satchel stitched with mottoes or a flower.

They trot like marionettes along the level,
Or drag themselves like wounded deer, poor crones !
Or dance, 'against their will, as if the devil
Were swinging in the belfry of their bones.

Cracked though they are, their eyes are sharp as drills
And shine, like pools of water in the night,—
The eyes of little girls whom wonder thrills
To laugh at all that sparkles and is bright.

The coffins of old women very often
Are near as small as those of children are.
Wise Death, who makes a symbol of a coffin
Displays a taste both charming and bizarre.

And when I track some feeble phantom fleeing
Through Paris's immense ant-swarming Babel,
I always think that such a fragile being
Is moving softly to another cradle.

Unless, sometimes, in geometric mood,
To see the strange deformities they offer,
I muse how often he who saws the wood
Must change the shape and outline of the coffer.

Those eyes are wells a million teardrops feed,
Crucibles spangled by a cooling ore,
Invincible in charm to all that breed
Austere Misfortune suckled with her lore.

II

Vestal whom old Frascati could enamour:
Thalia's nun, whose name was only known
To her dead prompter: madcap full of glamour
Whom Tivoli once sheltered as its own—

They all elate me. But of these a few,
Of sorrow having made a honeyed leaven,
Say to Devotion, 'Lend me wings anew,
O powerful Hippogriff, and fly to heaven.'"

One for her fatherland a martyr: one
By her own husband wronged beyond belief:
And one a pierced Madonna through her son—
They all could make a river with their grief.

III

Yes, I have followed them, time and again!
One, I recall, when sunset, like a heart,
Bled through the sky from wounds of ruddy stain,
Pensively sat upon a seat apart,

To listen to the music, rich in metal,
That's played by bands of soldiers in the parks
On golden, soul-reviving eves, to fettle,
From meek civilian hearts, heroic sparks.

This one was straight and stiff, in carriage regal,
She breathed the warrior-music through her teeth,
Opened her eye like that of an old eagle,
And bared a forehead moulded for a wreath.

IV

Thus, then, you journey, uncomplaining, stoic
Across the strife of modern cities flung,
Sad mothers, courtesans, or saints heroic,
Whose names of old were heard on every tongue,

You once were grace, and you were glory once.
None know you now. Derisory advances
Some drunkard makes you, mixed with worse affronts
And on your heels a child-tormentor prances.

But I who watch you tenderly: and measure
With anxious eye, your weak unsteady gait
As would a father—get a secret pleasure
On your account, as on your steps I wait.

I see your passionate and virgin crazes;
Sombre or bright, I see your vanished prime;
My soul, resplendent with your virtue, blazes,
And revels in your vices and your crimes.

Poor wrecks! My family! Kindred in mind, you
Receive from me each day my last addresses.
Eighty-year Eves, will yet tomorrow find you
On whom the claw of God so fiercely presses?

XCII

The Blind

My soul, survey them, dreadful as they seem.
Like marionettes, ridiculous they stare.
Strange as somnabulists that, in their dream,
Dart shadowy orbs around we know not where.

Their eyes, from which the heavenly spark has flown,
Remain uplifted, as in distant quest,
Skyward: but never on the paving stone
Do they pore dreamingly or come to rest.

They traverse thus the illimitable Dark,
Twin of eternal Silence. While the City
May sing around us, bellow, laugh, or bark,—

By pleasure blinded even to horror, I,
Too, drag my way, but, more a thing of pity.
Ask what the Blind are seeking there on high.

XCIII

A Passer-by

The deafening street roared on. Full, slim, and grand
In mourning and majestic grief, passed down
A woman, lifting with a stately hand
And swaying the black borders of her gown;

Noble and swift, her leg with statues matching;
I drank, convulsed, out of her pensive eye,
A livid sky where hurricanes were hatching,
Sweetness that charms, and joy that makes one die.

A lighting-flash—then darkness! Flecting chance
Whose look was my rebirth—a single glance!
Through endless time shall I not meet with you?

Far off! too late! or never!—I not knowing
Who you may be, nor you where I am going—
You, whom I might have loved, who know it too!

X C I V

The Skeleton Navvy

I.

Quaint anatomic plates are sold
Along the quays in third-hand stalls
Where tomes cadaverous and old
Slumber like mummies in their palls.

In them the craftsman's skill combines
With expert knowledge in a way
That beautifies these chill designs
Although the subject's far from gay.

One notes that, consummating these
Mysterious horrors, God knows how,
Skeletons and anatomies
Peel off their skins to delve and plough.

II.

Navvies, funereal and resigned,
From the tough ground with which you tussle
With all the effort that can find
Filletted spine or skinless muscle—

O grave-snatched convicts, say what strange
Harvest you hope from such a soil
And who the farmer is whose grange
You would replenish with this toil.

Mean you to show (O evil-starred
Exponents of too stark a doom)
The promised sleep may yet be barred,
Even from us, beyond the tomb;

That even extinction may turn traitor,
And Death itself, can be a lie;
And that perhaps, sooner or later,
Forever, when we come to die,

In some strange country, without wages,
On stubborn outcrops delving holes,
We'll push a shovel through the ages
Beneath our flayed and blinding soles?

XCV

Evening Twilight

Delightful evening, partner of the crook,
Steals in, wolf-padded, like a complice: look:
Heaven, like a garret, closes to the day,
And Man, impatient, turns a beast of prey.

Sweet evening, loved by those whose arms can tell,
Without a lie, "Today we've laboured well:"
Sweet evening, it is she who brings relief
To men with souls devoured by one fierce grief,
Obstinate thinkers drowsy in the head,
And toil-bent workmen groping to their bed.

But insalubrious demons of the airs,
Like business people, wake to their affairs
And, flying, knock, like bats, on walls and shutters.
Now Prostitution lights up in the gutters
Across the glimmering jets the wind torments.
Like a huge ant-hive it unseals its vents.
On every side it weaves its hidden tracks
Like enemies preparing night-attacks.
It squirms within the City's breast of mire,
A worm that steals the food that men desire.

One hears the kitchens hissing here and there,
Operas squealing, orchestras ablare.
Cheap *tables d'hôte*, where gaming lights the eyes,
Fill up with whores, and sharpers, their allies:
And thieves, whose office knows no truce nor rest,
Will shortly now start working, too, with zest,
Gently unhinging doors and forcing tills,
To live some days and buy their sweethearts frills.

Collect yourself, my soul, in this grave hour
And shut your ears against the din and stour.
It is the hour when sick men's pains increase.
Death grips them by the throat, and soon they cease
Their destined task, to find the common pit.
The ward is filled with sighings. Out of it
Not all return the scented soup to taste,
Warm at the hearthside, by some loved-one placed.

But then how few among them can recall
Joys of the hearth, or ever lived at all!

XCVI

The Gamblers

In faded armchairs, harlots of past years
Pale, with false eyebrows, wheedling, fatal eyes,
And weird, affected airs, clink from thin ears
A feeble sound, where tin with crystal vies.

Round the green tables, faces without lips,
Lips without colour, jaws their teeth surviving,
And fingers which a hellish fever grips
Convulsively in breasts and pockets diving

Under the dirty ceiling, lustres flame
And chandeliers, that blaze without remittance
On shady brows of poets dear to fame,
Who come to waste their sorely-sweated pittance.

Such was the picture, in nocturnal dreaming,
I saw unfurled to my clairvoyant eye.
In that grim vault, one form on elbows leaning,
Unspeaking, cold, and envious—was I!—

Yes! envying, for their all-tenacious passion,
These raddled tarts in their funereal glee,
Who trafficked there, in such a merry fashion,
Dead virtue and lost beauty on the spree.

My heart was chilled with fear at envying
Wretches who, headlong, rush to be destroyed,
And, drunk with their own blood, seek anything—
Hell, death, or torture—rather than the Void!

XCVII

The Dance of Death

TO ERNEST CHRISTOPHE

Proud, as a living person, of her height,
Her scarf and gloves and huge bouquet of roses,
She shows such nonchalance and ease as might
A thin coquette excessive in her poses.

Who, at a ball, has seen a form so slim?
Her sumptuous skirts extravagantly shower
To a dry foot that, exquisitely trim,
Her footwear pinches, dainty as a flower.

The frills that rub her collarbone, and feel,
Like a lascivious rill against a rock,
The charms she is so anxious to conceal,
Defend them, too, from ridicule and mock.

Her eyes are formed of emptiness and shade.
Her skull, with flowers so deftly decked about,
Upon her dainty vertebrae is swayed.
Oh what a charm when nullity tricks out!

“Caricature”, some might opine, but wrongly,
Whose hearts, too drunk with flesh that runs to waste,
Ignore the grace of what upholds so strongly.
Tall skeleton, you match my dearest taste!

Come you to trouble with your strong grimace,
The feast of life? Or has some old desire
Rowelled your living carcase from its place
And sent you, credulous, to feed its fire?

With tunes of fiddles and the flames of candles,
Hope you to chase the nightmare far apart,
Or with a flood of orgies, feasts, and scandals
To quench the hell that's lighted in your heart?

Exhaustless well of follies and of faults,
Of the old woe the alembic and the urn,
Around your trellised ribs, in new assaults,
I see the insatiable serpent turn.

I fear your coquetry's not worth the strain,
The prize not worth the effort you prolong.
Could mortal hearts your railleries explain?
The joys of horror only charm the strong.

The pits of your dark eyes dread fancies breathe,
And vertigo. Among the dancers prudent,
Hope not your sixteen pairs of smiling teeth
Will ever find a contemplative student.

Yet who's not squeezed a skeleton with passion?
Nor ravened with his kisses on the meat
Of charneis. What of costume, scent, or fashion?
The man who feigns disgust, betrays conceit.

O noseless geisha, unresisted gouge!
Tell these fastidious feigners, from your husk—
"Proud fondling fools, in spite of talc and rouge,
You smell of death. Anatomies of musk,

Withered Antinoüses, beaux of dunder,
Corpses in varnish, Lovelaces of bone,
The dance of death, with universal thunder,
Is whirling you to places yet unknown!

From Seine to Ganges frolicking about,
You see not, through a black hole in the ceiling,
Like a great blunderbus, with funnelled snout,
The Angel's trumpet, on the point of pealing.

In every clime, Death studies your devices
And vain contortions, laughable Humanity,
And oft, like you, perfumes herself with spices
Mixing her irony with your insanity!''

XCVIII

Love of Lies

Dear indolent, I love to watch you so,
While on the ceiling break the tunes of dances,
And hesitant, harmoniously slow,
You turn the wandering boredom of your glances.

I watch the gas-flares colouring your drawn,
Pale forehead, which a morbid charm enhances,
Where evening lamps illuminate a dawn
In eyes as of a painting that entrances :

And then I say, "She's fair and strangely fresh,
Whom memory crowns with lofty towers above.
Her heart is like a peach's murdered flesh,
Or like her own, most ripe for learned love."

Are you an autumn fruit of sovereign flavour?
A funeral urn awaiting tearful showers?
Of far oases the faint, wafted savour?
A dreamy pillow? or a sheaf of flowers?

I have known deep, sad eyes that yet concealed
No secrets: caskets void of any gem:
Medallions where no sacred charm lay sealed,
Deep as the Skies, but vacuous like them!

It is enough that your appearance flatters,
Rejoicing one who flies from truth or duty.
Your listless, cold stupidity—what matters?
Hail, mask or curtain, I adore your beauty!

XCIX

Neighbouring on the city, I recall
Our snow-white house, so full of peace and small:
The casts of Venus and Pomona too
Whose limbs a tiny thicket hid from view.
The sun at eve, cascading fire and gold,
Behind the glass, his sheaf of rays unrolled,
Then, like an eye, inquisitively seemed
To watch our long, hushed dinners as we dreamed;
Like candle-flames his glories, as they poured,
Lit our serge curtains and our simple board.

C

Now the great-hearted servant, who aroused
Your jealousy, in humble earth is housed,
Let's take, at least, some flowers for her relief.
The dead, the piteous dead, know piercing grief,
And when October blows, to prune old trees,
And whistles round the marble where they freeze,
How thankless then we living must appear
Between warm sheets to sleep in comfort here,
While, eaten by black dreams, they lie in woe
Warm bedmates and their gossip to forego,
Frostbitten skeletons, tunneled by vermin,
To bear the moulting drip of Winter's ermine,
For ages, with no friends nor kindred there
The tatters on their railings to repair.

On evenings when the hearthlogs hiss and flare
Were I to see her calmly take her chair:
Or, in the calm and blue December gloom,
Huddle within the corner of my room,
Gravely returning from her bed eternal
To tend this grown-up child with the maternal
Care of old times—how could I then reply
To see the tears roll from each hollow eye?

Mist and Rain

O Autumns, Winters, Springs! Seasons of mire!
Soul-drowsing times! I love you. Take my praise
For shrouding thus my heart and brain entire
In a vague tomb and winding-sheet of haze.

Through the long nights when the south-wester swings
The rusty vanes that shriek upon the towers,
My soul can fully stretch its raven wings
More easily than in the warmer hours.

Nothing is sweeter to funereal hearts
On whom the frost of ages has been laid—
Wan seasons, when you queen it round these parts,—

Than the eternal sight of your pale shade: . . .
Unless on moonless midnights, pair by pair,
To lull, upon chance beds, our hearts' despair.

CII

Parisian Dream

TO CONSTANTIN GUYS

I.

Of the dread landscape that I saw,
Where human eyes were never set,
I still am ravished by the awe
That, vague and distant, haunts me yet.

Sleep is of miracles so faint
That I (O singular caprice!)
As being formless, could obtain
That vegetable life should cease.

A painter, in my genius free,
I there exulted in the fettle
Derived from a monotony
Composed of marble, lymph, and metal.

Babels of stairways and arcades,
Endless and topless to behold,
With ponds, and jets, and steep cascades
Filling receptacles of gold:

Ponderous cataracts there swung
Like crystal curtains, foaming shawls—
Dazzling and glittering they hung
Suspended from the metal walls.

Not trees, but colonnades, enclosed
Motionless lakes, besides whose shelves
Gigantic naiades reposed,
Like women, gazing at themselves.

Blue sheets of water interlay
Unnumbered quays of green and rose,
That stretched a million leagues away
To where the bounds of space impose.

'Twas formed of unknown stones that blazed
And magic waves that intersect,
Where icebergs floated, seeming dazed
With all they mirror and reflect.

Impassive, cold, and taciturn,
Great Ganges, through the sky's vast prism,
Each poured the treasures of its urn
Into a diamond abysm.

Architect of my fairy scene,
I willed, by wondrous stratagems,
An ocean, tamed, to pass between
A tunnel that was made of gems.

There all things, even the colour black,
Seemed iridescently to play,
And liquid crystallised its lack
Of outline in a frozen ray.

No star, no sun could be discerned,
Even low down, in that vast sky:
The fire was personal that burned
To show these marvels to the eye.

Above these moving wonders sheer
There soared (that such a thing should be !
All for the eye, none for the ear !)
'A silence of eternity.

II.

My opening eyes, as red as coal,
The horror of my lodging met.
I felt re-entering my soul
The knife of cares and vain regret.

The clock with brutal accent played
Funereal chimes. The time was noon.
And heaven covered, with its shade,
The world, this fatuous balloon!

CIII

Morning Twilight

Reveillé in the barracks and the camps.
The wind of morning blew upon the lamps.
It was the hour when evil dreams in swarms
On pillows twist brown, adolescent forms:
When like a bleeding eye that's twitched with pain
Each lantern smudged the day with crimson stain:
The soul, against its body's weight of brawn,
Lay struggling, like the lanterns with the dawn:
Like a sad face whose tears the breezes dry
The air grew tremulous with things that fly,
And women tired of love, and men of writing.

The chimneys, here and there, showed fires were lighting.
Women of pleasure, slumber to be-slut,
Lay open-mouthed with livid eyelids shut.
Dangling thin dugs, cold pauper-women blew
Upon the embers and their fingers too.
It was the hour when, what with cold and squalor,
Women in labour aggravate their dolour,
And like a sob, choked short with bloody froth,
The cock-crow tore the foggy air as cloth.

Like seas the mists round every building poured
While agonising patients in the ward,
In broken hiccoughs, rattled out their lives:
And worn-out rakes recled homeward to their wives.
Aurora, in a shift of rose and green,
Came shivering down the Seine's deserted scene
And Paris, as he rubbed his eyes, began
To sort his tools, laborious old man.

LE VIN

CIV

The Soul of Wine

One night the wine was singing in the bottles :
“Mankind, dear waif, I send to you, in spite
Of prisoning glass and rosy wax that throttles,
A song that’s full of brotherhood and light.

I know what toil, and pain, and sweat you thole,
Under the roasting sun on slopes of fire,
To give me life and to beget my soul—
So I will not be thankless to my sire,

Because I feel a wondrous joy to dive
Down, down the throat of some work-wearied slave.
His warm chest is a tomb wherein I thrive
Better than in my subterranean cave.

Say, can you hear that rousing catch resound
Which hope within my beating heart sings high?
(With elbows on the table, sprawl around,
Contented hearts ! my name to glorify.)

I’ll light the eyes of your delighted wife.
Your son I’ll give both rosy health and muscle
And be to that frail athlete of this life
Like oil that primes the wrestler for the tussle.

In you I fall, ambrosia from above,
Sown by the hand of the eternal Power,
That poetry may blossom from our love
And rear to God its rare and deathless flower !”

CV

The Wine of the Rag Pickers

Often, in some red street-lamp's glare, whose flame
The wind flaps, rattling at its glassy frame,
In the mired labyrinth of some old slum
Where crawling multitudes ferment their scum—

With judge-like nods, a rag-picker comes reeling,
Bumping on walls, like poets, without feeling,
And scorning cops, now vassals of his state,
Begins on glorious subjects to dilate,

Takes royal oaths, dictates his laws sublime,
Exalts the injured, and chastises crime,
And, spreading his own daïs on the sky,
Is dazzled by his virtues, starred on high.

Yes, these folk, badgered by domestic care,
Ground down by toil, decrepitude, despair,
Buckled beneath the foul load that each carries,
The motley vomit of enormous Paris—

Come home, vat-scented, trailing clouds of glory,
Followed by veteran comrades, battle-hoary,
Whose whiskers stream like banners as each marches.
—Flags, torches, flowers, and steep-triumphal arches

Rise up for them in magic hues and burn,
Since through this dazzling orgy they return,
While drums and clarions daze the sun above,
With glory to a nation drunk with love!

Thus Wine, through giddy human life, is rolled,
Like Pactolus, a stream of burning gold;
Through man's own throat his exploits it will sing,
And reign by gifts, as best befits a king.

To lull their laziness and drown their rancour,
For storm-tossed wrecks a temporary anchor,
God, in remorse, made sleep. Man added Wine,
Child of the Sun, immortal and divine!

C VI

The Wine of the Murderer

My wife is dead. I'm free. From hence
I'll drink my fill, and that's the truth!
Each time I came back with no pence,
Her screechings drilled me like a tooth.

Now I'm as happy as a king . . .
Air pure, a cloudless sky above.
I can remember such a thing
The summer that we fell in love.

To quench the thirst that tears my throat
It would require the vats to flow
Enough to set her tomb afloat—
And that's no thimbleful, oh no!

I threw her in a well to drown,
With the walled rocks that round it stood,
To keep her there, and hold her down—
I would forget her if I could!

Pleading our early tender vows,
Which naught could break for evermore,
To reconcile us, spouse to spouse,
In the same raptures as before—

I begged of her a *rendez-vous*
One evening in a gloomy lane.
She came—a crazy thing to do!
We all are more-or-less insane!

She still was quite attractive, though
A little tired and ill: and I
Still loved her more than ever: so
I said, "Get out of life, and die!"

None understand me. Could a single
"Drunk" of the stupid sort design,
On morbid nights, by his own ingle,
To make a winding sheet of wine?

Of dense invulnerable stuff,
Like engines built to shunt or shove,
They've never known, through smooth or rough,
The veritable power of love,

Its black enchantments, fiery trials,
Processions of infernal pains,
Its burning tears, its poison phials,
Its rattling bones, and jingling chains.

Now I am free and all alone.
To-night I'll get dead-drunk, of course.
My head I'll pillow on a stone
Without repentance or remorse.

And there I'll sleep like any dog.
The lumbering cart with massive wheels
Piled up with stones, or peat, or bog,
Or hurtling wagon, as it reels

May crush my skull in, like a clod,
Or halve me at the crossing-level.
I'd care as little as for God,
The Ten Commandments, or the Devil.

CVII

The Wine of the Solitary Man

The love-glance of a courtesan that swims
With undulating ray like that the moon
Sends to the waiting, tremulous lagoon
Where she's about to lave her languid limbs:

The last few florins in a gambler's fingers:
The lustful kiss of slender Adeline:
A haunting tune that wheedles and malingers,
Wherein all human anguish seems to pine:—

All these aren't worth, O bottle kind and deep,
The penetrating balms that swell your paunch
The pious poet's wounded heart to staunch.

You pour him hope, youth, life, and healing sleep—
And pride, all Beggary's diadem and treasure,
By which our triumphs with the Gods' we measure.

C VIII

The Wine of Lovers

Oh, what a splendour fills all space !
Without bit, spur, or rein to race,
Let's gallop on the steeds of wine
To heavens magic and divine !

Now like two angels off the track,
Whom wild relentless fevers rack,
On through the morning's crystal blue
The swift mirages we'll pursue.

Now softly poised upon the wings
That a sagacious cyclone brings,
In parallel delirium twinned,

While side by side we surf the wind,
We'll never cease from such extremes,
To seek the Eden of our dreams !

LES FLEURS DU MAL

CIX

Destruction

Always the Demon fidgets here beside me
And swims around, impalpable as air:
I drink him, feel him burn the lungs inside me
With endless evil longings and despair.

Sometimes, knowing my love of Art, he uses
Seductive forms of women: and has thus,
With specious, hypocritical excuses,
Accustomed me to philtres infamous.

Leading me wayworn into wastes untrod
Of boundless Boredom, out of sight of God,
Using all baits to compass my abduction,
Into my eyes, confused and full of woe,
Soiled clothes and bleeding gashes he will throw
And all the grim regalia of Destruction.

CX

The Martyr

(Drawing by an Unknown Master)

Amongst gilt fabrics, flasks of scent and wine,
Rich furniture, white marble, precious moulds.
Fine paintings, and rich, perfumed robes that shine
Swirled into sumptuous folds,

In a warm room, that like a hot-house stifles
With dangerous and fatal breath, where lie
Pale flowers in crystal tombs, exquisite trifles,
Exhaling their last sigh—

A headless corpse, cascading in a flood
Hot, living blood, that soaks, with crimson stain
A pillow slaked-and sated with blood
As any field with rain.

Like those pale visions which the gloom aborts
Which fix us in a still, hypnotic stare,
The head, tricked out w th gems of sorts,
In its huge mass of hair,

Like a ranunculous beside the bed,
Rests on the table, empty of all thought.
From eyes revulsed, like twilight, seems to spread
A gaze that looks at naught,

Upon the bed the carcase, unabashed,
Shows, in complete abandon, without shift,
The secret splendour that, in life, it flashed
Superbly, Nature's gift.

A rosy stocking, freaked with clocks of gold,
Clings to one leg: a souvenir, it seems:
The garter, from twin diamonds, with the cold
Stare of a viper gleams.

The singular effect of solitude
And of a languorous portrait, with its eyes
Provocative as is its attitude,
Dark loves would advertise—

And guilty joys, with feasts of strange delight,
Full of infernal kisses, omens certain
To please the gloating angels of the Night
Who swim behind each curtain.

And yet to see her nimble strength, the risky
Swerve of the rounded shoulder, and its rake,
The tented haunch, the figure lithe and frisky,
Flexed like an angry snake,

You'd know that she was young. Her soul affronted,
Her senses stung with boredom—were they bayed
By packs of wandering, lost desires, and hunted,
And finally betrayed?

The vengeful man, whose lust you could not sate,
(In spite of much love) nor quench his fire—
Did he on your dead flesh then consummate
His monstrous, last desire?—

Answer me, corpse impure! With fevered fist,
Grim visage, did he raise you up on high,
And, as your silver frosty teeth he kissed,
Bid you his last goodbye?

Far from inquiring magistrates that sneer,
Far from this world of railly and riot,
Sleep peacefully, strange creature, on your bier,
Of mystery and quiet.

Your lover roams the world. Your deathless shape
Watches his sleep and hears each indrawn breath.
No more than you can he ever escape
From constancy till death!

CXI

Damned Women

Like pensive cattle lying on the sand
They scan the far horizon of the ocean,
Foot seeking foot, hand magnetising hand,
With sweet or bitter tremors of emotion.

Some with their hearts absorbed in confidences,
Deep in the woods, where streamlets chatter free,
Spell the loved names of childish, timid fancies,
And carve the green wood of the fresh, young tree

Others, like sisters wander, slow and grave,
Through craggy haunts of ghostly emanations,
Where once Saint Anthony was wont to brave
The purple-breasted pride of his temptations.

Some by the light of resin-scented torches
In the dumb hush of caverns seek their shrine,
Invoking Bacchus, killer of remorse,
To liven their delirium with wine.

Others who deal with scapulars and hoods
Hiding the whiplash under their long train,
Mingle, on lonely nights in sombre woods,
The foam of pleasure with the tears of pain.

O demons, monsters, virgins, martyrs, you
Who trample base reality in scorn,
Whether as nuns or satyrs you pursue
The infinite, with cries or tears forlorn,

You, whom my soul has tracked to lairs infernal,
Poor sisterhood, I pity and adore,
For your despairing griefs, your thirst eternal,
And love that floods your hearts for evermore!

CXII

The Two Good Sisters

Debauchery and Death are pleasant twins,
And lavish with their charms, a buxom pair!
Under the rags that clothe their virgin skins,
Their wombs, though still in labour, never bear.

For the curst poet, foe to married rest,
The friend of hell, and courtier on half-pay—
Brothels and tombs reserve for such a guest
A bed on which repentance never lay.

Both tomb and bed, in blasphemy so fecund
Each other's hospitality to second,
Prepare grim treats, and hatch atrocious things.

Debauch, when will you bury me? When, Death,
Mingle your Cypress in the selfsame wreath
With the infected Myrtles that she brings?

CXIII

The Fountain of Blood

My blood in waves seems sometimes to be spouting
As though in rhythmic sobs a fountain swooned.
I hear its long, low, rushing sound till, doubting,
I feel myself all over for the wound.

Across the town, as in the lists of battle,
It flows, transforming paving stones to isles,
Slaking the thirst of creatures, men, and cattle,
And colouring all nature red for miles.

Sometimes I've sought relief in precious wines
To lull in me the fear that undermines,
But found they sharpened every sense the more.

I've also sought forgetfulness in lust,
But love's a bed of needles, and they thrust
To give more drink to each rapacious whore.

CXIV

Allegory

She is a woman of appearance fine
Who lets her tresses trail into her wine.
Love's claws and poisons, brewed in sinks of sin,
Fall blunted from the granite of her skin.
She mocks Debauchery, Death leaves her blithe,
Two monsters always handy with the scythe.
In their grim games, where so much beauty's wrecked,
They treat her majesty with due respect.
Half goddess, half sultana, without scathe,
In pleasure she's a Moslem's steady faith.
Betwecn her open arms, filled by her breasts,
For all mankind with burning eyes she quests,
And she believes, this fruitless virgin-wife,
Who's yet so necessary to this life,
That beauty of the body is a gift
Sublime enough all infamy to shift,
And win forgiveness. She knows naught of Hell.
When the Night comes, in which she is to dwell,
Straight in the face she'll look her deadly Fate,
Like one new-born—without remorse or hate.

Beatrice

In charred and ashen fields without a leaf,
 While I alone to Nature told my grief,
 I sharpened, as I went, like any dart;
 My thought upon the grindstone of my heart—
 When by a troop of vicious demons led,
 A great black cloud rushed down towards my head.
 As loafers at a lunatic they leered
 And in my face inquisitively peered.
 With nods and signs, like dwarfed and apish elves,
 They laughed, and winked, and spoke among themselves.

“This parody of Hamlet, take his measure,
 And contemplate the travesty at leisure.
 Is it not sad to see the puzzled stare,
 The halting gait, and the dishevelled hair
 With which this clownish actor, on half-pay,
 Because he is an artist in his way,
 Attempts to interest, in the griefs he sings,
 Eagles, and crickets, flowers, and running springs,
 And even us, the authors of his woe,
 Howling his sorrows as a public show?”

I could have dominated with my pride
 That horde of demons and the taunts they cried,
 Just by the mere aversion of my face—
 Had I not seen, amongst that evil race,
 (A crime that did not even daze the sun!)
 Queen of my heart, the peerless, only one,
 Laughing with them to see my dark distress,
 And giving them, at times, some lewd caress.

CXVI

Voyage to Cytherea

My heart, a bird, seemed joyfully to fly
And round the rigging cruised with nimble gyre.
The vessel rolled beneath the cloudless sky
Like a white angel, drunk with solar fire.

What is that sad, black island like a pall?
Why, Cytherea, famed in many a book,
The Eldorado of old-stagers. Look:
It's but a damned poor country after all!

Isle of sweet secrets and heart-feasting fire!
Of antique Venus the majestic ghost
Rolls like a storm of fragrance from your coast
Filling our souls with languor and desire!

Isle of green myrtles, where each flower uncloses,
Adored by nations till the end of time:
Sighs of adoring hearts, like incense, climb.
And pour their perfume over sheaves of roses,

Or groves of turtles in an endless coo!
But no! it was a waste where nothing grows,
Torn only by the raucous cries of crows:
Yet there a curious object rose in view.

This was no temple hid in bosky trees,
Where the young priestess, amorous of flowers,
Whom secretly a loving flame devours,
Walks with her robe half-open to the breeze.

For as we moved inshore to coast the shallows
And our white canvas scared the crows to fly,
Like a tall cypress, blackened on the sky,
We saw it was a gaunt three-forking gallows.

Fierce birds, perched on their meal, began to slash
And rip with rage a rotten corpse that swung.
Each screwed and chiselled with its beak among
The crisp and bleeding crannies of the hash.

His eyes were holes: from open stomach direly
His heavy tripes cascaded to his thighs.
Gorged with such ghastly dainties to the eyes,
His torturers had gelded him entirely.

Beneath, some jealous prowling quadrupeds,
With lifted muzzles, for the leavings scrambled.
The largest seemed, as in the midst he gambolled,
An executioner among his *aides*.

Native of Cytherea's cloudless clime
In silent suffering you paid the price,
And expiated ancient cults of vice
With generations of forbidden crime.

Ridiculous hanged man! Your griefs I know.
I felt, to see you swing above the heath,
Like nausea slowly rising to my teeth,
The bilious stream of ancient human woe.

Poor devil, dear to memory! before me
I seemed to feel each talon, fang, and beak
Of all the stinking crows and panthers sleek
That in my lifetime ever chewed and tore me.

The sky was charming and the sea unclouded,
But all was black and bloody to my mind.
As in a dismal winding-sheet entwined,
My heart was in this allegory shrouded.

A gallows where my image hung apart
Was all I found on Venus' isle of sighs.
O God, give me the strength to scrutinise,
Without disgust, my body and my heart!

CXVII

Love and the Skull

(Old Tail-piece)

With bold and insolent grimace,
Love laughingly bestrides
The bare skull of the Human Race,
And, as enthroned he rides,
Blows bubbles from his rosy cheek
Which soar into the sky
As if, beyond the blue, to seek
The other worlds on high.
They ride with wondrous verve at first,
Reflect the sunny beams,
Then spit their flimsy souls, to burst
And fade like golden dreams.
I hear the skull at each renewal
Expostulate aghast—
“ This game, ridiculous and cruel—
When will it end at last ?
For what your cruel mouthpiece drains
And scatters, sud by sud,
Monstrous Assassin ! is my brains,
My substance, and my blood.”

REVOLTE

The following Author's Note was printed in the first edition of *LES FLEURS DU MAL* (1857).

Among the following poems, the most notorious one has already appeared in one of the principal literary reviews of Paris; it has been taken, at least by intelligent people, for what it is, a *pastiche* on the arguments used by ignorance and anger. Keeping the painful task which he has set himself, the author of *LES FLEURS DU MAL* has, like a true comedian, assumed the attitudes of sophistry and of corruption. No doubt, this candid statement will not prevent "honest" critics from ranking him among the theologians of the mob, and accusing him of being sorry that our Saviour Jesus Christ, the eternal, voluntary victim, did not play the role of a conqueror, of a destroying and equalitarian Attila. Many will doubtless utter the Pharisee's usual thanksgiving: "I thank Thee, Lord, that I am not as this infamous poet".

CXVIII

The Denial of Saint Peter

What does God do with that huge storm of curses
That rises daily to the seraphim?
Like some gorged tyrant, while his guts he nurses,
Our blasphemies are lullabies to him.

Martyrs and tortured victims with their cries
Compose delicious symphonies, no doubt,
Because, despite the blood they cost, the skies
Can always do with more when they give out.

Jesus, remember, in the olive trees—
In all simplicity you prayed afresh
To One whom your own butchers seemed to please
In hammering the nails into your flesh.

To see your godhead spat on by the like
Of scullions, and of troopers, and such scum,
And feel the thorns into your temples strike
Which held, of all Humanity, the sum:

To feel your body's horrifying weight
Lengthen your arms, to feel the blood and sweat
Itching your noble forehead pale with fate,
And as a target to the world be set,

Then did you dream of brilliant days of song,
When, the eternal promise to fulfill,
You mounted on an ass and rode along,
Trampling the flowers and palms beneath your feet,

When whirling whips, and full of valiant force,
The money-lenders quailed at your advance:
When you, in short, were master? Did remorse
Not pierce your body further than the lance?

I am quite satisfied to leave so bored
A world, where dream and action disunite.
I'd use the sword, to perish by the sword.
Peter denied his Master? . . . He did right!

CXIX

Abel and Cain

I.

Race of Abel! eat, sleep, drink.
God smiles on those that he prefers.
Race of Cain! in swamps that stink,
Crawl, and die the death of curs.
Race of Abel! your crops sprout,
And your flocks are safe and sound.
Race of Cain! your guts howl out
In hunger, like an ancient hound.
Race of Abel! warm your guts
At the patriarchal fire.
Race of Cain! in caves and huts
Shiver like jackals in the mire.
Race of Abel! Pullulate :
Your gold too procreates its kind.
Race of Cain! Hearts hot with hate,
Leave all such appetites behind.
Race of Abel! grow and graze,
Like woodlice that on timbers prey.
Race of Cain! along rough ways
Lead forth your family at bay.

II.

Ah! Race of Abel! your fat carrion
Will well manure the soil it presses.
Race of Cain! One task to carry on
Remains for you, a task that presses.
Race of Abel! Shame is nigh.
The coulter's beaten by the sword.
Race of Cain, climb up the sky,
And to the earth hurl down the Lord.

CXX

Litanies of Satan

Wisest of Angels, whom your fate betrays,
And, fairest of them all, deprives of praise,
Satan have pity on my long despair!

O Prince of exiles, who have suffered wrong,
Yet, vanquished, rise from every fall more strong,
Satan have pity on my long despair!

All-knowing lord of subterranean things,
Who remedy our human sufferings,
Satan have pity on my long despair!

To lepers and lost beggars full of lice,
You teach, through love, the taste of Paradise.
Satan have pity on my long despair!

You who on Death, your old and sturdy wife,
Engendered Hope—sweet folly of this life—
Satan have pity on my long despair!

You give to the doomed man that calm, unbaffled
Gaze that rebukes the mob around the scaffold,
Satan have pity on my long despair!

You know in what closed corners of the earth
A jealous God has hidden gems of worth.
Satan have pity on my long despair!

You know the deepest arsenals, where slumber
The breeds of buried metals without number.
Satan have pity on my long despair!

You whose huge hand has hidden the abyss
From sleepwalkers that skirt the precipice,
Satan have pity on my long despair!

You who give suppleness to drunkards' bones
When trampled down by horses on the stones,
Satan have pity on my long despair!

You who, to make his sufferings the lighter,
Taught man to mix the sulphur with the nitre,
Satan have pity on my long despair!

You fix your mask, accomplice full of guile,
On rich men's foreheads, pitiless and vile.
Satan have pity on my long despair!

You who fill the hearts and eyes of whores
With love of trifles and the cult of sores,
Satan have pity on my long despair!

The exile's staff, inventor's lamp, caresser
Of hanged men, and of plotters the confessor,
Satan have pity on my long despair!

Step-father of all those who, robbed of pardon,
God drove in anger out of Eden's garden.
Satan have pity on my long despair!

Prayer

Praise to you, Satan! in the heights you lit,
And also in the deeps where now you sit,
Vanquished, in Hell, and dream in hushed defiance.
O that my soul, beneath the Tree of Science
Might rest near you, while shadowing your brows,
It spreads a second Temple with its boughs.

LA MORT

CXXI

The Death of Lovers

We shall have beds round which light scents are wafted,
Divans which are as deep and wide as tombs;
Strange flowers that under brighter skies were grafted
Will scent our shelves with rare exotic blooms.

When, burning to the last their mortal ardour,
Our torch-like hearts their bannered flames unroll,
Their double light will kindle all the harder
Within the deep, twinned mirror of our soul.

One evening made of mystic rose and blue,
I will exchange a lightning-flash with you,
Like a long sob that bids a last adieu.

Later, the Angel, opening the door
Faithful and happy, will at last renew
Dulled mirrors, and the flames that leap no more.

CXXII

The Death of Paupers

It's Death comforts us, alas ! and makes us live.
It is the goal of life, it brings us hope,
And, like a rich elixir, seems to give
Courage to march along the darkening slope.

Across the tempest, hail, and hoarfrost, look !
Along the black horizon, a faint gleam !
It is the inn that's written in the book
Where one can sleep, and eat, and sit and dream.

An Angel, in magnetic hands it holds
Sleep and the gift of sweet ecstatic dreams,
And makes a bed for poor and naked souls.

It is God's glory and the mystic grange :
The poor man's purse and fatherland it seems,
And door that opens Heavens vast and strange.

CXXIII

The Death of Artists

How often must I shake my bells, and kiss
Your brow, sad Travesty? How many a dart,
My quiver, shoot at Nature's mystic heart
Before I hit the target that I miss?

We'll still consume our souls in subtle schemes,
Demolishing tough harness, long before
We see the giant Creature of our dreams
Whom all the world is weeping to adore.

Some never knew their Idol, though they prayed:
And these doomed sculptors, with an insult branded,
Hammer your brows and bosom, heavy-handed,

In the one hope, O Capitol of shade!
That Death like some new sun should rise and give
Warmth to their wasted flowers, and make them live.

CXXIV

The End of the Day

Under the wan, dejected skies,
Impudent, raucous, full of treason,
This life runs dancing without reason.
Voluptuous night begins to rise,

Appeasing even those who fast,
Ravenous hunger making tame,
• And hiding all things, even shame,
Until the Poet says, “At last

My spirit, like my weary spine,
Can do with slumber, that is certain,
Sad dreams invade this heart of mine.

I'm off to lie down on my back,
And roll myself into your curtain,
Refreshing shadows, dense and black!”

CXXV

Dream of a Curious Person

T O F. N.

Have you known such a savoury grief as I ?
Do people say “ Strange fellow ! ”, whom you meet ?
—My amorous soul, when I was due to die,
Felt longing mixed with horror ; pain seemed sweet.

Anguish and ardent hope (no factious whijn)
Were mixed : and as the sands of life ran low
My torture grew delicious yet more grim,
And of this dear old world would not let go.

I seemed a child, so keen to see the Show
He feels a deadly hatred of the Curtain . . .
And then I saw the hard, cold truth for certain.

I felt that dreadful dawn around me grow
With no surprise or vestige of a thrill.
The curtain rose—and I stayed waiting still.

CXXVI

The Voyage

TO MAXIME DU CAMP

For children crazed with postcards, prints, and stamps
All space can scarce suffice their appetite.
How vast the world seems by the light of lamps,
But in the eyes of memory how slight!

One morning we set sail, with brains on fire,
And hearts swelled up with rancorous emotion.
Balancing, to the rhythm of its lyre,
Our infinite upon the finite ocean.

Some wish to leave their venal native skies,
Some flee their birthplace, others change their ways,
Astrologers who've drowned in Beauty's eyes,
Tyrannic Circe with the scent that slays.

Not to be changed to beasts, they have their fling
With space, and splendour, and the burning sky,
The suns that bronze them and the frosts that sting
Efface the mark of kisses by and by.

But the true travellers are those who go
Only to get away: hearts like balloons
Unballasted, with their own fate aglow,
Who know not why they fly with the monsoons:

Those whose desires are in the shape of clouds.
And dream, as raw recruits of shot and shell,
Of mighty raptures in strange, transient crowds
Of which no human soul the name can tell.

II

Horror! We imitate the top and bowl
In swerve and bias. Through our sleep it runs.
It's Curiosity that makes us roll
As the fierce Angel whips the whirling suns.

Singular game! where the goal changes places;
The winning-post is nowhere, yet all round;
Where Man tires not of the mad hope he races
Thinking, some day, that respite will be found.

Our soul's like a three-master, where one hears
A voice that from the bridge would warn all hands.
Another from the foretop madly cheers
"Love, joy, and glory" . . . Hell! we're on the sands!

The watchmen think each isle that heaves in view
An Eldorado, shouting their belief.
Imagination riots in the crew
Who in the morning only find a reef.

The fool that dotes on far, chimeric lands—
Put him in irons, or feed him to the shark!
The drunken sailor's visionary lands
Can only leave the bitter truth more stark.

So some old vagabond, in mud who grovels,
Dreams, nose in air, of Edens sweet to roam.
Wherever smoky wicks illumine hovels
He sees another Capua or Rome.

III

Amazing travellers, what noble stories
We read in the deep oceans of your gaze!
Show us your memory's casket, and the glories
Streaming from gems made out of stars and rays!

We, too, would roam without a sail or steam,
And to combat the boredom of our jail,
Would stretch, like canvas on our souls, a dream,
Framed in horizons, of the seas you sail.

What have you seen:

IV

“ We have seen stars and waves.
We have seen sands and shores and oceans too,
In spite of shocks and unexpected graves,
We have been bored, at times, the same as you.

The solar glories on the violet ocean
And those of spires that in the sunset rise,
Lit, in our hearts, a yearning, fierce emotion
To plunge into those ever-luring skies.

The richest cities and the scenes most proud
In nature, have no magic to enamour
Like those which hazard traces in the cloud
While wistful longing magnifies their glamour.

Enjoyment adds more fuel for desire,
Old tree, to which all pleasure is manure;
As the bark hardens, so the boughs shoot higher,
And nearer to the sun would grow mature.

Tree, will you always flourish, more vivacious
Than cypress?—None the less, these views are yours:
We took some photographs for your voracious
Album, who only care for distant shores.

We have seen idols elephantine-snowed,
And thrones with living gems bestarred and pearled,
And palaces whose riches would have routed
The dreams of all the bankers in the world.

We have seen wonder-striking robes and dresses,
Women whose nails and teeth the betel stains
And jugglers whom the rearing snake caresses.”

V

What then? What then?

VI

“O childish little brains,
Not to forget the greatest wonder there—
We’ve seen in every country, without searching,
From top to bottom of the fatal stair
Immortal sin ubiquitously lurching:

Woman, a vile slave, proud in her stupidity,
Self-worshipping, without the least disgust:
Man, greedy, lustful, ruthless in cupidity,
Slave to a slave, and sewer to her lust:

The torturer’s delight, the martyr’s sobs,
The feasts where blood perfumes the giddy rout:
Power sapping its own tyrants: servile mobs
In amorous obeisance to the knout:

Some similar religions to our own,
All climbing skywards: Sanctity who treasures,
As in his downy couch some dainty drone,
In horsehair, nails, and whips, his dearest pleasures.

Prating Humanity, with genius raving,
As mad today as ever from the first,
Cries in fierce agony, its Maker braving,
‘O God, my Lord and likeness, be thou cursed!’

But those less dull, the lovers of Dementia,
Fleeing the herd which fate has safe impounded,
In opium seek for limitless adventure.
—That’s all the record of the globe we rounded.”

VII

It's bitter knowledge that one learns from travel.
The world so small and drab, from day to day,
The horror of our image will unravel,
A pool of dread in deserts of dismay.

Must we depart, or stay? Stay if you can.
Go if you must. One runs: another hides
To baffle Time, that fatal foe to man.
And there are runners, whom no rest betides,

Like the Apostles or the Wandering Jew,
Whom neither ship nor waggon can enable
To cheat the retiary. But not a few
Have killed him without stirring from their cradle.

But when he sets his foot upon our nape
We still can hope and cry "Leave all behind!"
As in old times to China we'll escape
With eyes turned seawards, hair that fans the wind,—

We'll sail once more upon the sea of Shades
With heart like that of a young sailor beating.
I hear the rich, sad voices of the Trades
Who cry "This Way! all you who would be eating

The scented Lotus. Here it is they range
The piles of magic fruit. O hungry friend,
Come here and swoon away into the strange
Trance of an afternoon that has no end."

In the familiar tones we sense the spectre.
Our Pylades stretch arms across the seas,
"To salve your heart, now swim to your Electra"
She cries, of whom we used to kiss the knees.

VIII

O Death, old Captain, it is time. Weigh anchor!
To sail beyond the doldrums of our days.
Though black as pitch the sea and sky, we hanker
For space; you know our hearts are full of rays.

Pour us your poison to revive our soul!
It cheers the burning quest that we pursue,
Careless if Hell or Heaven be our goal,
Beyond the known world to seek out the New!

LES EPAVES 1866

Romantic Sunset

How lovely is the sun, when, freshly soaring,
Like an explosion, first he bids "Good-Day".
Happy the man, on gorgeous sunsets poring,
Who can salute with love its parting ray.

I've seen all things, flower, furrow, pond, and rill,
Swoon in his gaze like a poor heart that dies.
Run to the skyline. It is late. We still
May catch one parting ray before it flies.

But it's in vain I chase my God receding.
Night irresistible, damp, black, unheeding
Establishes her empire, full of fear.

Amongst the shades a grave-like odour trails.
My naked feet walk into chilly snails
And bullfrogs unforeseen along the mere.

PIECES CONDAMNEES TIREES DES
FLEURS DU MAL

II

Lesbos

Mother of Grecian joys and Latin games,
Lesbos, where kisses, languishing or gay,
As melons cool, or warm as solar flames,
Adorn alike the glorious night and day :
Mother of Grecian joys and Latin games,

Lesbos of kisses reckless as cascades
That hurl themselves to bottomless abysses,
Stormy and secret, myriad-swarming kisses,
That cluck and sob and gurgle in the shades.
Lesbos of kisses reckless as cascades !

Lesbos where Phrynes each to each are plighted,
Where never yet unanswered went a sigh,
Where Paphos with a rival is requited,
And Venus with a Sappho has to vie !
Lesbos where Phrynes each to each are plighted,

Lesbos, the land of warm and languid night,
Where gazing in their mirrors as they dress
The cave-eyed girls, in barren, vain delight,
The fruits of their nubility caress.
Lesbos, the land of warm and languid night,

Let Plato frown austerely all the while.
Your pardon's from excess of kisses won,
Queen of sweet empire, rare and noble isle—
And from refinements which are never done.
Let Plato frown austerely all the while.

From martyrdom your pardon you beguile,
Inflicted without stint on hearts that soar
Far, far away, drawn by some radiant smile
Seen vaguely on a strange celestial shore.
From martyrdom your pardon you beguile.

Lesbos, what God to judge you would make bold,
Or damn your brows so pale and sadly grave,
Not having weighed upon the scales of gold
The floods of tears you've poured into the wave.
Lesbos which God to judge you would make bold?

For us, what mean the statutes of the just?
Pride of the isles, whose hearts sublimely swell,
Your faith as any other is august
And Love can laugh alike at Heaven and Hell.
For us, what mean the statutes of the just?

For Lesbos chose me of all men on earth
To sing the secrets of her virgin flowers,
Taught as a child the sacred rites of mirth
And mysteries of sorrow which are ours.
So Lesbos chose me of all men on earth.

Since then I watch on the Leucadian height.
Like a lone sentry with a piercing view
Who sees the vessels ere they heave in sight
With forms that faintly tremble in the blue.
Since then I watch on the Leucadian height

To find out if the sea's heart still is hardened
And from the sobs that drench the rock with spray
If it will bring back Sappho, who has pardoned,
The corpse of the adored, who went away
To find out that the sea its heart has hardened;

Of the male Sappho, lover, queen of singers,
More beautiful than Venus by her woes.
The blue eye cannot match the black, where lingers
The shady circle that her grief bestows
On the male Sappho, lover, queen of singers—

Fairer than Venus towering on the world
And pouring down serenity like water
In the blond radiance of her tresses curled
To daze the very Ocean with her daughter,
Fairer than Venus towering on the world—

Of Sappho, whom her blasphemy requited
The day she quit the rite and scorned the cult,
And gave her lovely body to be slighted
By a rough brute, whose scorn was the result
For Sappho, whom the blasphemy requited.

And since that time has Lesbos lived lamenting
In spite of all the honours of mankind,
And lives upon the storm-howl unrelenting
Of its bleak shores, the sport of wave and wind:
For since that time has Lesbos lived lamenting.

III

Damned Women

Delphine and Hippolyta

Over deep cushions, drenched with drowsy scents
Where fading lamplight shed its dying glow,
Hippolyta recalls and half-repents
The kisses that first thawed her youthful snow.

She sought, with tempest-troubled gaze, the skies
Of her first innocence, now far away,
As travellers who backward turn their eyes
To blue horizons passed at break of day.

Within her haggard eyes the tears were bright.
Her broken look, her dazed, voluptuous air,
Her vanquished arms like weapons shed in flight,
Enhanced her fragile beauty with despair.

Stretched at her feet Delphine contented lay
And watched with burning eyeballs from beneath
Like a fierce tigress who, to guard her prey,
Has set a mark upon it with her teeth.

Strong beauty there to fragile beauty kneeling,
Superb, she seemed to sniff the heady wine
Of triumph: and stretched out to her, appealing
For the reward of raptures half-divine.

She sought within her victim's pallid eye
Dumb hymns that pleasure sings without a choir,
And gratitude that, like a long-drawn sigh,
Swells from the eyelid, swooning with fire.

“Hippolyta, dear heart, have you no trust ?
Do you not know the folly that exposes
To the fierce pillage of the brawling gust
The sacred holocaust of early roses ?

My kisses are as light as fairy midges
That on calm evenings skim the crystal lake.
Those of your man would plough such ruts and ridges
As lumbering carts or tearing coulters make.

They'll tramp across you, like a ruthless team
Of buffaloes or horses, yoked in lust.
Dear sister, turn your face to me, my dream,
My soul, my all, my twin, to whom I trust !

Turn me your eyes of deepest, starry blue.
For one of those deep glances that you send,
I'd lift the veil of darkest joys for you
And rock you in a dream that has no end.”

But then Hippolyta raised up her head,
“No blame nor base ingratitude I feel,
But, as it were, a kind of nauseous dread
After some terrible, nocturnal meal.

I feel a swooping terror that explodes
In legions of black ghosts towards me speeding
Who crowd me on to swiftly moving roads,
That, sliced by sheer horizons, end up bleeding.

Have we done something monstrous that I tremble ?
Explain, then, if you can ; for when you say,
‘Angel’, I cower. Yet I cannot dissemble
That, when you speak, my lips are drawn your way.

Oh, do not fix me with a stare so steady
You whom I love till death in still submission,
Yes, even though you, like an ambush ready,
Are the beginning of my own perdition.”

Then Delphine stamped and shook her tragic mane,
And, like a priestess, foaming and fierce, and fell,
Spoke in a lordly and prophetic strain
—“Who dares, in front of Love, to mention Hell?

Curbed forever be that useless dreamer
Who first imagined, in his brutish mind,
Of sheer futility the fatuous schemer,
Honour with Love could ever be combined.

He who in mystic union would enmesh
Shadow with warmth, and daytime with the night,
Will never warm his paralytic flesh
At the red sun of amorous delight.

Go, if you wish, and seek some boorish lover:
Offer your virgin heart to his crude hold,
Full of remorse and horror you'll recover,
And bring me your scarred breast to be consoled

Down here, a soul can only serve one master.”
But the girl, venting her tremendous woe,
Cried out “I feel a huge pit of disaster
Yawning within: it is my heart, I know!

Like a volcano burning, deep as death,
There's naught that groaning monster can assuage
Nor quench of thirst the Fury's burning breath
Who brands it with a torch to make it rage.

Let our closed curtains isolate the rest,
Until exhaustion bring us sleep, while I
Annihilate myself upon your breast
And find in you a tomb on which to die.”

Go down, go down, poor victims, it is time;
The road to endless hell awaits your lusts.
Plunge to the bottom of the gulf, where crime
Is flagellated by infernal gusts.

Swirling pell-mell, and with a tempest’s roar,
Mad shades, pursue your craving without measure:
Your rages will be sated nevermore,
Your torture is begotten of your pleasure.

No sunbeam through your dungeon will come leaking:
Only miasmic fevers, through each chink,
Will filter, like sick lanterns, redly streaking,
And penetrate your bodies with their stink.

The harsh sterility of all you relish
Will swell your thirst, and turn you both to hags.
The wind of your desire, with fury hellish
Will flog your flapping carrion like wet flags.

Far from live folk, like werewolves howling high,
Gallop the boundless deserts you unroll.
Fulfill your doom, disordered minds, and fly
The infinite you carry in your soul.

IV

Lethc

Rest on my heart, deaf, cruel soul, adored
Tigress, and monster with the lazy air.
I long, in the black jungles of your hair,
To force each finger thrilling like a sword:

Within wide skirts, filled with your scent, to hide
My bruised and battered forehead hour by hour,
And breathe, like dampness from a withered flower.
The pleasant mildew of a love that died.

Rather than live, I wish to sleep, alas!
Lulled in a slumber soft and dark as death,
In ruthless kisses lavishing my breath
Upon your body smooth as burnished brass.

To swallow up my sorrows in eclipse,
Nothing can match your couch's deep abysses;
The stream of Lethe issues from your kisses
And powerful oblivion from your lips.

Like a predestined victim I submit:
My doom, to me, henceforth, is my delight,
A willing martyr in my own despite
Whose fervour fans the faggots it has lit.

To drown my rancour and to heal its smart,
Nepenthe and sweet hemlock, peace and rest,
I'll drink from the twin summits of a breast
That never lodged the semblance of a heart.

V

To One Who Is Too Gay

Your head, your gestures, and your air
Are lovely as a landscape; smiles
Ripple upon your face at whiles
Like winds in the clear sky up there.

The grumpy passers that you graze
Are dazzled by the radiant health,
And the illimitable wealth
Your arms and shoulders seem to blaze.

The glaring colours that, in showers,
Clash in your clothes with such commotion,
In poets' minds suggest the notion
Of a mad ballet-dance of flowers.

These garish dresses illustrate
Your spirit, striped with every fad.
O madwoman, whom, quite as mad,
I love as madly as I hate.

Sometimes in gardens, seeking rest,
Where I have dragged my soul atonic,
I've felt the sun with gaze ironic
Tearing the heart within my breast.

The spring and verdure, dressed to stagger,
Humiliate me with such power
That I have punished, in a flower,
The insolence of Nature's swagger.

And so, one night, I'd like to sneak,
When night has tolled the hour of pleasure,
A craven thief, towards the treasure
Which is your person, plump and sleek.

To punish your bombastic flesh,
To bruise your breast immune to pain,
To furrow down your flank a lane
Of gaping crimson, deep and fresh.

And, most vertiginous delight !
Into those lips, so freshly striking
And daily lovelier to my liking—
Infuse the venom of my sprite.

The Jewels

My well-beloved was stripped. Knowing my whim,
 She wore her tinkling gems, but naught besides :
 And showed such pride as, while her luck betides,
 A sultan's favoured slave may show to him.

When it lets off its lively, crackling sound,
 This blazing blend of metal crossed with stone,
 Gives me an ecstasy I've only known
 Where league of sound and lustre can be found.

She let herself be loved: then, drowsy-eyed,
 Smiled down from her high couch in languid ease.
 My love was deep and gentle as the seas
 And rose to her as to a cliff the tide.

My own approval of each dreamy pose,
 Like a tamed tiger, cunningly she sighted :
 And candour, with lubricity united,
 Gave piquancy to every one she chose.

Her limbs and hips, burnished with changing lustres,
 Before my eyes clairvoyant and serene,
 Swanned themselves, undulating in their sheen ;
 Her breasts and belly, of my vine the clusters,

Like evil angels rose, my fancy twitting,
 To kill the peace which over me she'd thrown,
 And to disturb her from the crystal throne
 Where, calm and solitary, she was sitting.

So swerved her pelvis that, in one design,
Antiope's white rump it seemed to graft
To a boy's torso, merging fore and aft.
The talc on her brown tan seemed half-divine.

The lamp resigned its dying flame. Within,
The hearth alone lit up the darkened air,
And every time it sighed a crimson flare
It drowned in blood that amber-coloured skin.

The Metamorphoses of the Vampire

The crimson-fruited mouth that I desired—
 While, like a snake on coals, she twinged and twired,
 Kneading her breasts against her creaking busk—
 Let fall those words impregnated with musk,
 —“My lips are humid: by my learned science,
 All conscience, in my bed, becomes compliance.
 My breasts, triumphant, staunch all tears; for me
 Old men, like little children, laugh with glee.
 For those who see me naked, I replace
 Sun, moon, the sky, and all the stars in space.
 I am so skilled, dear sage, in arts of pleasure,
 That, when with man my deadly arms I measure,
 Or to his teeth and kisses yield my bust,
 Timid yet lustful, fragile, yet robust,
 On sheets that swoon with passion—you might see
 Impotent angels damn themselves for me.”

When of my marrow she had sucked each bone
 And, languishing, I turned with loving moan
 To kiss her in return, with overplus.—
 She seemed a swollen wineskin, full of pus.
 I shut my eyes with horror at the sight,
 But when I opened them, in the clear light,
 I saw, instead of the great swollen doll
 That, bloated with my lifeblood, used to loll,
 The debris of a skeleton, assembling
 With shrill squawks of a weathercock, lie trembling,
 Or sounds, with which the howling winds commingle,
 Of an old Inn-sign on a rusty tringle.

GALANTERIES

VIII

The Fountain

My darling of a sweetheart, close,
For a long time, your great, tired eyes,
Keeping them in that languid pose
Where pleasure took them by surprise.
Out in the court the fountain chatters
And does not cease by day or night.
The swoon of ecstasy it flatters
In which love plunges me tonight.

Its sheaf uprears
A myriad flowers,
While Phoebe sheers
Through pearl-flushed hours,
To rain down tears
In glittering showers.

So does your flashing soul ignite
In lightnings of voluptuous bliss
And rushes reckless up the height
As though the enchanted sky to kiss;
Then it relaxes, grows more fine,
And in sad languor falls apart
Down an invisible incline
Into the deep well of my heart.

Its sheaf uprears
A myriad flowers,
While Phoebe sheers
Through pearl-flushed hours,
To rain down tears
In glittering showers.

O you whom night so beautifies
How sweet unto your breast to bend
And hear the water as it sighs
Into the ponds without an end
Moon, singing water, blessed night
And trees that tremble up above—
Your melancholy charms my sprite
And is the mirror of my love.

Its sheaf uprears
A myriad flowers,
While Phoebe sheers
Through pearl-flushed hours,
To rain down tears
In glittering showers.

IX

Bertha's Eyes

The most illustrious gaze you may despise,
Eyes of my child, where filters and takes flight
I know not what of goodness, soft as night.
Pour out on me your lovely shade, dear eyes!

Great eyes of my dear child! arcanes adored!
You seem like magic caves where shadow darkles
And, through the mass of crowded gloom, there sparkles
And scintillates some richly treasured hoard.

My girl has eyes as deep, vast, and serene
As you, O night, immense, and lit like you;
Their fires are thoughts of Love, with faith shot through,
Voluptuous, and chaste, though sparkling keen.

X

Hymn

To the most lovely, the most dear,
The Angel, and the deathless grail—
Who fill my heart with radiance clear—
In immortality all hail!

Into my life she flows translated
As saline breezes fill the sky,
And pours into my soul unsated
The taste of what can never die.

Sachet, forever fresh, perfuming
Some quiet nook of hid delight;
A lone forgotten censer fuming
In secrecy across the night.

How, flawless love, with truth impart
Your purity and keep it whole,
O unseen grain of musk who art
The core of my eternal soul?

To the most lovely, the most dear,
The angel, and the deathless grail—
Who fill my life with radiance clear—
In immortality all hail!

XI

The Monster

I.

Beloved, certainly you're not
What Veuillot calls a "tenderling".
Bubbling in you, as in a pot,
Dice, lust and revel have their fling.
My dear old child, you're surely not

Too fresh these days. However, dear,
Your tireless game of fast-and-loose
Has given you that smooth venceur,
That things acquire from constant use.
It has its charms, however dear.

I do not find it growing stale—
That sap your forty summers bring
Since autumn fruits with me prevail
Over the banal flowers of spring.
No! you are never dull nor stale.

Your carcase for your age atones,
And gives particular delight
In hollows of your collar 'bones,
And other places out of sight.
Your carcase certainly atones.

A fig for those poor doting fools
Who're nelson-struck and pumpkin mad,
Since I prefer your clavicles
To those King Solomon once had.
A fig for such poor doting fools!

A blue-black helmet is your hair.
It shades your warrior's brow whereon
Both thoughts and blushes are so rare—
And then sweeps backward, and is gone!
A blue black helmet is your hair.

Your eyes resemble mud and mire,
Whereon a flaring lantern streaks,
Reflects the fard upon your cheeks,
And glows with pale infernal fire.
Your eyes are coloured like the mire.

By its voluptuous disdain
Your bitter lip provokes our lust.
It's Eden's apple once again,
Half is attraction, half disgust,
In its voluptuous disdain.

Your leg, so muscular and dry,
Could climb volcanoes, never stop,
And, spite of snow, and wind, and rain,
Perform a cancan at the top.
Your leg is muscular and dry.

Your burning skin is void of sweetness :
Like an old soldier's it appears.
To sweat it never had the weakness
More than your eyes could furnish tears.
And yet it has a kind of sweetness !

II.

Fool! You are driving to the Devil.
Willingly I would go with you
If the momentum of your revel
Did not exasperate me too.
Fool! go, alone, then, to the Devil.

My hip, my lung, my hams, my thigh
Won't let me longer pay respects
(Although it often makes me sigh)
To that great Lord, as he expects.
It's very sad for ham and thigh.

Oh most sincerely do I suffer
Not to accompany your freaks ;
When he is flatululating sulphur
To see you kiss him where he leaks.
O most sincerely do I suffer !

I feel so devilish annoyed
No more to serve you as a socket,
You hellish torch ! Infernal rocket !
And to declare my duty void ;
I do feel devilish annoyed,

Since for a long, long time I love you
Being so logical. My dream
Was of all ill to skim the cream,
Place no monstrosity above you
And own you in that line supreme.
Truly, old monster ! yes, I love you.

EPIGRAPHES

XII

Verses for Honoré Daumier's Portrait

The man whose image this presents,
In art more subtle than the rest,
Teaches us sagely, as 't is best,
To chuckle at our own expense.

In mockery he stands apart.
His energy defies an equal
In painting Evil and its sequel—
Which proves the beauty of his heart--

Melmoth or Mephostopheles,
His mirth has naught akin to theirs.
The flambeau of Alecto flares
To singe them, while it makes us freeze.

Their merriment they come to rue
So steeped in treachery and guile,
While his frank radiating smile
Declares him to be good and true.

XIII

On Manet's Picture "Lola of Valencia"

Amongst the myriad flowers on beauty's stem
It's hard to choose. Such crowds there are of them
But Lola burns with unexpected fuel
The radiance of a black and rosy jewel.

XIV

On Delacroix's picture of Tasso in Prison

The poet, sick, and with his chest half bare
Tramples a manuscript in his dark stall,
Gazing with terror at the yawning stair
Down which his spirit finally must fall.

Intoxicating laughs which fill his prison
Invite him to the Strange and the Absurd.
With ugly shapes around him have arisen
Both Doubt and Terror, multiform and blurred.

This genius cooped in an unhealthy hovel,
These cries, grimaces, ghosts that squirm and grovel
Whirling around him, mocking as they call,

This dreamer whom these horrors rouse with screams,
They are your emblem, Soul of misty dreams
Round whom the Real erects its stifling wall.

PIECES DIVERSES

XV

The Voice

My cot was next the library, a Babel
Where fiction jostled science, myth and fable.
Greek dust with Roman ash there met the sight.
And I was but a folio in height
When two Voices addressed me. "Earth's a cake,"
Said one, "and full of sweetness. I can make
Your appetite to its proportions equal
Forever and forever without sequel."
Another said "Come, rove in dreams, with me,
Past knowledge, thought or possibility".
That voice sang like the wind along the shore
And, though caressing, frightened me the more.
I answered "O sweet Voice!" and from that date
Could never name my sorrow or my fate.
Behind the giant scenery of this life
I see strange worlds: with my own self at strife,
Ecstatic victim of my second sight,
I trail huge snakes, that at my ankles bite.
And like an ancient prophet, from that time,
I've loved the desert, found the sea sublime;
I've wept at festivals and laughed at wakes:
And found in sourest wines a sweet that slakes;
Falsehoods for facts I love to swallow whole,
And often fall, star-gazing, in a hole.
But the Voice cheers—"Keep dreaming. It's a rule
No sage can dream such beauty as a fool".

XVI

The Ransom

Man, for his ransom, has two fields,
Two fields of tufa, deep and rich,
Which he must duly delv^r and ditch.
His reason is the hoc he wields.

In order to extort one rose,
Or to produce a few poor ears,
He has to squander showers of tears
In watering the seeds he sows.

One field is Art, the other Love;
And both must for his favour bloom
When the strict Judge appears above
Upon the dreadful day of doom.

Man's granges must be filled to burst
With crops and flowers, whose form and shade
Must win the angels' suffrage first
Before his ransom can be paid.

XVII

To a Girl from Malabar

Your feet are finer than your hands, and bigger
Your haunch than plumpest white ones are. Your figure
Is to a pensive artist dear and fresh.

Your velvet eyes are darker than your flesh.
In hot blue lands, where your God gave you being,
Your task, lighting your master's pipe, and seeing
The jars well filled with lymph, the flasks with scent,
Or switching the mosquitoes—there you went,
When dawn sang through the rustling planes, to buy
Plantains or pineapples from the nearby
Bazaar. All day, at will, barefoot you passed
Humming old unknown tunes: and when at last
The sun went down, bright red, across the flat,
You flung your body on the wicker mat;
And full of humming birds, your floating dream
Was gay and flowery as you always seem.

How, happy child, did you come here to France.
This overpeopled land, by what mischance,
When to your tamarinds you bade adieu
Confiding in the sailors of the crew?
But now half-clothed in muslin frail and thin,
While frost and sleet assail your shivering skin,
With brutal corsets prisoning you fast,
How you must long for the old, carefree past!
Now you must glean your dinners from the mud
And sell the perfumes of your flesh and blood,
In our foul mists, with pensive eyes still straying
To catch a glimpse of phantom palm trees swaying.

SUPPLEMENT AUX FLEURS
DU MAL 1866—1868

NOUVELLES FLEURS DU MAL

I

Midnight Enquiry

The clocks strike midnight one by one
Ironically to remind us,
And ask what profit we have won
Out of the day we've left behind us.
The Thirteenth, Friday, as it chances !
A fatal date ; when all is said,
In spite of all we know, we've led
The most heretical of dances.

Today we've spent blaspheming Jesus,
The incontestable, sole Lord ;
Like a base sponger at the board
Of some intolerable Croesus,
We have, to please the beast within us,
The Devil's worthy advocate,
Defamed all that whose love should win us,
And flattered all that we should hate.

The weak man, like a bullying coward,
We harmed, and wrongly did despise ;
We worshipped Folly, where he towered,
Huge bull-horned monster, to the skies.
We have lain kissing stupid Matter
With great devotion to its presence,
And of Corruption stooped to flatter
The wan, mephitic phosphorescence.

To drown our vertigo entire
And our delirium to nourish—
Proud priest of the immortal Lyre
Whose glory it has been to flourish
The rapture of funereal things—
We've eaten without appetite,
Unthirsting drunk of muddy springs.
Come, quick, my soul, blow out the light,
To hide in shades of blackest night!

II

Epigraph for a Condemned Book

Dear reader, peaceful and bucolic,
Ingenuous, sober, hierophantic,
Lay by this book so corybantic,
So Saturnine, and melancholic.

If elsewhere than in Satan's school
You learned your syntax and your grammar,
Lay by! You'll think I rave and stammer
And am a stark, hysterical fool.

But if, not yielding to their charm,
Your eye can plumb the gulfs of harm—
Then learn to love me, read my verses.

Inquiring sufferer, who seek
Your paradise, to you I speak:
Pity me! . . . else, receive my curses!

III

Sad Madrigal

I

That you are good what does it matter?
Be sad: be beautiful! The rain
Rejuvenates the flowering plain.
As streams do landscapes, teardrops flatter
Your face. Your looks, by weeping, gain.

When joy from your dejected forehead
Has fled, your heart is in the power
Of torment, and, to make you cower,
The huge cloud of your past, with horrid
Black shadow, overlooms the hour,

I love you most: and when your eye
Pours water hot as blood in battle,
And when, despite the fact that I
Am nursing you, you give a cry
Like death, an agonising rattle.

Delicious hymn, profound delight,
Pleasure divine! I breathe with zest
The sobs arising from your breast.
I think your heart must blaze the light
Of pearls that from your eyes are pressed.

II

I know your heart once more disgorges
Its old uprooted love-affairs:
And flaming with the heat of forges
You feel the pride of vanished orgies,
Which makes the damned put on such airs.

But now ere yet your evil dreams
Reflect the red flames of the Pit,
While in an endless nightmare scheming
Of poison-draughts and daggers gleaming,
Cold steel and powder tempt your wit:

While yet in fear the door you answer
And see all things with vague mistrust:
Free from his grasp, O dear entrancer,
And not yet partnered for a dancer
With irresistible Disgust,

You'll never claim, both queen and slave,
Who only love me with affright
In the sick silence of the night,
And while your feelings inly rave—
To match with me in power or might.

IV

The Fang

Each Man who's fit to be so called
A Serpent in his heart has got,
As though upon a throne installed,
Who when he says "I will", says "Not".

If your gaze the gaze transfixes
O satyresses or of nixies,
The Fang says, "Is your duty done?"

Breed brats, plant trees, perform your task,
Write verse, chip stone—the Fang will ask,
"Will you be there at set of sun?"

Men scheme each night and hope each morning,
Yet no man grows one moment riper
But suffers, at each turn, the warning
Of the insufferable viper.

V

The Rebel

An angel from the sky swoops like an eagle,
Seizes the culprit's hair in his strong fist,
And shakes him, saying "You must know what's legal!
For I am your Good Angel. I insist.

Know you must cherish, without wry grimaces,
The poor, deformed, blockheaded, sick, and vile:
And thus unroll for Christ's triumphal paces
The carpet of your charity in style.

For such is Love! Before your heart grows dim,
Light up your heart from God and burn for him.
That is the true delight that lasts for ever".

The Angel, by his love filled with more ardour,
With giant fists belabours him the harder.
The damned soul always answers, "I will never".

VI

Far Away From Here

This is the room, the sacred nest
Of that girl so richly dressed,
Tranquil and ready for her guest.

With one hand she fans her nipples
Elbow on the couch at rest
Listening to the ponds and ripples.

This room is Dorothy's. The play
Of wind and water, far away,
With fainting song and rhythmic sobs,
Through her reverie hums and throbs.

From head to toe with greatest care
Her skin is polished, to adorn her
With benjamin and oils as rare . . .
Some flowers are swooning in a corner.

VII

Meditation

Be good, my Sorrow: hush now: settle down.
You sighed for dusk, and now it comes: look there!
A denser atmosphere obscures the town,
To some restoring peace, to others care.

While the lewd multitude, like hungry beasts,
By pleasure scourged (no thug so fierce as he!)
Go forth to seek remorse among their feasts—
Come, take my hand; escape from them with me.

From balconies of sky, around us yet,
Lean the dead years in fashions that have ceased.
Out of the depth of waters smiles Regret.

The sun sinks moribund beneath an arch,
And like a long shroud rustling from the East,
Hark, Love, the gentle Night is on the march.

VIII

The Gulf

Wherever Pascal went, his gulf was spread,
All is abyss—dream, act, desire, or word!
And often by the wind of terror stirred
I've felt the hair shoot upright on my head.

High up, low down, all round, the depth descending,
The verge, the silence, the dread captor, Space.
Behind my nights I see God's finger trace
A Nightmare multiform yet never-ending.

I dread my sleep like some enormous hole
Full of vague horror, leading to no goal.
All windows bare the infinite to me.

My soul, in its vertiginous endeavour,
Envies the senseless void—Ah, never never
From entities or numbers to be free!

IX

Complaint of an Icarus

Those who love whores are well-endowed,
Spry, and well-fed, and cheerful-spoken.
But, as for me, my arms are broken
From trying to embrace a cloud.

To what two peerless stars have done
That kindle in the farthest skies,
I owe it that my burnt-out eyes
Know only memories of the sun.

In vain I've tried to find the pole
And the equator-line of space.
I know not by what burning gaze
The wings were molten from my soul.

By love of beauty singed, I fall
Yet fail the honour and the bliss
To give my name to the abyss
Which serves me for my tomb and pall.

X

The Lid

Wherever Man may go, by earth or ocean,
Beneath a sky of fire, or sun snow-cold,
Whether to Christ or Venus his devotion,
In gloomy want, or glittering with gold;

Citizen, vagabond, stamplicker, farmer,
Be his small brain slow-witted, quick, or sly,
For this strange terror he can find no armour
Nor look to heaven save with trembling eye.

Above, the Sky, that 'cellar-ceiling, stifles,
Lit up for comic farce, where struts and trifles
Each mummer on a floor of blood and mire.

Terror of rakes, the crazy hermits' hope—
Beneath its cauldron-lid mankind must grope,
Never above its margin to aspire.

POEMES AJOUTES A L'EDITION POSTHUME

XI

Pagan Prayer

Don't stint the fires with which you flare.
Warm up my dull heart to delight,
O Pleasure, torture of the sprite,
O Goddess, hear my fervent prayer!

Goddess, who through the ether pass,
Flame in this subterranean hole!
Raise up a chilled and stricken soul
Who lifts to you his peal of brass.

O Pleasure, always be my queen!
In flesh and velvet to be seen,
Mask your beauty like a siren:

Or else my soul with sleep environ
Drained from the formless mystic wine,
Elastic phantom! which is thine.

XII

The Moon Offended

O moon, to whom our fathers used to pray,
From your blue home, where, odalisques of light,
The stars will follow you in spruce array,
Old Cynthia, lantern of our dens by night,

Do you see sleeping lovers on their couches
Reveal the cool enamel of their teeth :
The poet at his labours, how he crouches :
And vipers—how they couple on the heath ?

In yellow domino, with stealthy paces,
Do you yet steal with clandestine embraces
To clasp Endymion's pale, millenial charm ?

—“I see your mother, by her mirror, buckled
By weight of years, poor child of death and harm !
Patching with art the breast at which you suckled !”

XIII

To Théodore de Banville, 1842

Your hands have seized the goddess by the hair
In such a grasp, so finally and fully,
One thinks of some Herculean young Bully
Flooring his mistress with a lordly air.

With clear eyes radiant with precocious fire,
You've shown such pride in architecture fine
And such a pure audacity of line—
One knows to what your manhood will aspire.

Poet! Our blood, through every pore outpressed,
Escapes from us as if the Centaur's vest
Made a funereal rill of every vein;

One thinks that vest was dyed in vengeful spittle
Of the two snakes that Hercules, when little,
Throttled in his two fists till they were slain.

CONCLUSION

The Unforeseen

Harpagon watched his father slowly dying
And musing on his white lips as they shrunk,
Said, " There is lumber in the outhouse lying
It seems : old boards and junk."

Celimene cooed, and said, " How good I am
And, naturally, God made my looks excell "
(Her callous heart, thrice-smoked like salted ham,
Will burn in endless Hell!)

A smoky scribbler, to himself a beacon,
Says to the wretch whom he has plunged in shade—
" Where's the Creator you so loved to speak on,
The Saviour you portrayed? "

But best of all I know a certain rogue
Who yawns and weeps, lamenting night and day
(Impotent fathead) in the same old brogue,
" I will be good—one day! "

The clock says in a whisper, " He is ready
The damned one, whom I warned of his disaster.
He's blind, and deaf, and like a wall unsteady,
Where termites mine the plaster ".

Then one appeared whom all of them denied
And said with mocking laughter " To my manger
You've *all* come; to the Black Mass I provide
Not one of you's a stranger.

You've built me temples in your hearts of sin.
You've kissed my buttocks in your secret mirth.
Know me for Satan by this conquering grin,
As monstrous as the Earth.

D'you think, poor hypocrites surprised red-handed,
That you can trick your lord without a hitch;
And that by guile two prizes can be landed—
Heaven, and being rich ?

The wages of the huntsman is his quarry,
Which pays him for the chills he gets while stalking.
Companions of my revels grim and sorry
I am going to take you walking,

Down through the denseness of the soil and rock,
Down through the dust and ash you leave behind,
Into a palace, built in one sole block,
Of stone that is not kind :

For it is built of Universal Sin
And holds of me all that is proud and glorious ”
—Meanwhile an angel, far above the din,
Sends forth a peal victorious

For all whose hearts can say, “ I bless thy rod;
And blessed be the griefs that on us fall.
My soul is but a toy, Eternal God,
Thy wisdom all in all ! ”

And so deliciously that trumpet blows
On evenings of celestial harvestings,
It makes a rapture in the hearts of those
Whose love and praise it sings.